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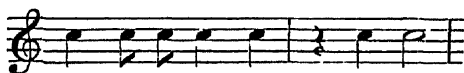


THE AUGS

AN EXAGGERATION

by

G. B. STERN



Augs' Tattoo.



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“One half of the world knoweth not
how the other half liveth.”

Rabelais.

Little Fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brush'd away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

William Blake.

To
JOHN VAN DRUTEN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Clifford's Bay is an entirely imaginary town and all the entertainments and incidents which are described as taking place there are entirely fictitious.

CHAPTER I

EVEN William the Fourth seemed to think that Thomas ought to make this journey down the pier, for he pointed towards it, benevolently and permanently, with his right forefinger. "Go, Thomas!" his statue might have been saying from its pedestal on the wide sea-front outside the Esplanade Hotel. "There, young man, lies your direction."

So twopence to get through the turnstile, and Thomas Gordon Leigh started on his lonely Odyssey down the pier. Because he was eight, he was perfectly competent to manage this tremendous affair of getting right to the end, to that cluster of buildings that looked like the Eastern City in his Dulac picture-book. But his grandpapa, Colonel Leigh, had said, every time he asked: "Not in all that damn crowd," and muttered something which Thomas could not hear; and his father had said: "There are too many people just now, Tommy. And there are other reasons. I'll get you some chalks instead."

So he had escaped—no, nothing so sensational as escaped. He had walked out from the house. No one had heard the click of the front gate. Just luck! He could not have been seen marching cautiously down the steep garden-path that zig-zagged from the front door to the road, because it was scooped out of what seemed a high and solid mass of jungle. His sister Sheila called it The Bushery. Sheila was thirteen. Christopher would be twelve to-morrow. And Thomas was now on that exciting peninsula of boards that parted just widely enough to show that land was no more under you; you were already at sea; held to

the land, but undoubtedly at sea.

It was a grey day towards the middle of September, the year before the murder at Clifford's Bay. A vigorous wind swept in and buffeted Thomas on his left cheek and all down his left side, with that curious tang in its freshness that made him call it "pier wind," for it was utterly different from the wind which struck you on the beach or on the parade, or up in the garden on the hill at the Cliff House. Thomas shivered a little, but he was not cold. He tramped rather heavily, liking the sound of the boards under his feet. He looked up at the tall cases of bright metal and flashing glass that were ranged stiffly to the left and to the right, between him and the open sea: mysterious machines with stiff little dolls and stiff bright scenery immovable behind the glass. Thomas knew they *could* move, for he had just caught a passing glimpse, before Nurse sharply called him to come on, of some business, active but incoherent, that happened not on the pier, but on the parade, when one of the jolly crowd that Grandpa had disliked so much put a penny into a slot, in exactly the same way as Thomas reluctantly put an occasional penny into his money-box at home. Nothing at all happened over the money-box, but here—

He stood still and looked round, hoping again to hear that fascinating jingle and clink, as somebody's penny fell and was swallowed. Now he was alone; he need not be tugged away. He did not himself put a penny into one of these automatic monsters, because it was a little frightening to be responsible for whatever cruel things were set slowly and inevitably in motion. Thomas was sure they were cruel, but all the same, he hoped by the magic of some adult's penny to be able to watch these sinister little figures pass from death into life. While he waited he

heard from the station a little way ahead a shout of "All aboard!" That meant, using his common sense, that a train was putting out to sea. Ought he to run and catch it? The cry came again: "All aboard!" and at the same moment a party of three or four—no, more than that, a party of five or six—no, only three, but they were very large, rolled up to the machines where Thomas had been waiting. And they had their hands in their pockets, where coins were kept, and one of them called out: "Here, I say! Let's try this one! This one here looks good. 'The British Execution.' Ought to be fun. Buy British, that's our motto! Come on, let's see the old boy hanged!"

Thomas thrilled; let the train go out to sea without him. He was going to see an old boy hanged. . . . He did not quite know what he was going to see. The picture inside the glass told him nothing: a low house and a big gate, that was all.

The man with the penny was slowly spelling aloud the instructions: "Place penny in slot. The bell will toll, gates open; last rites are performed; unfortunate man drops; gates close, and Black Flag is hoisted to show that justice has been done."

The penny went in.

"Nothing's going to happen," said the owner disgustedly, after a pause. "What a sell!"

But Thomas could not believe that nothing was going to happen. So he continued to stare hard at the low house, and at the big wooden gates.

"Ain't workin', see? Some of 'em's always getting out of order. Time and time again I've gone and been and put in pennies and lost 'em. Somebody ought to complain."

"Look, there's a man coming along now. You go, Joe. You complain to 'im."

"Shut up! Listen!"

They had begun to move away, but they stopped and listened.

"Well, if that's all. Sounds to me like muffins, or time for tea."

"Sounds to me like Ma's old bicycle."

But to Thomas, whose ear and whose eye had been fixed unwaveringly, it sounded like a bell tolling, a deep bell and a loud tolling. And now it had stopped, and the gates flew apart with terrifying swiftness, and the victim was seen with a splodgy white face and a rope round his neck, his arms pinioned, standing on a platform, two warders in attendance. A priest in a white robe exhorted him, with one arm stiffly jerking. The platform suddenly disappeared, and so did the prisoner, into the dark and secretive bowels of the machine, leaving the rope horridly taut. Then, slowly this time, the gates closed again.

"And that's what comes of leaving 'ome too young! You take notice of that, young Alf. Come along, there ain't nothing more."

"Yes, there is. Let's have our money's worth. 'The Black Flag is hoisted!' Sez they. I don't see a Black Flag."

"Yes, look! There it is!"

But Thomas could not find the very stiff little bit of paper on a match-stick that was pushed up from the roof of the prison. He was almost too terrified to see anything. The pier and all its fantastic equipment wavered and swelled and dwindled again. So this was what came of leaving home too young. The man had said so. And *he* had left home, and he was sure they would all say he was too young. Should he go back quickly now, abandon this glorious expedition, abandon his visit to the Eastern city

thrust out miles and miles away in the middle of the sea? Or should he go on, and risk a horrid fate down in the mysterious cellars underneath the little prison behind the glass case?

A couple of cheery men, one of them with a dirty leather bag in his hand, approached the automatic machine, and in the most casual manner inserted a key into the lock of the lower part, swung it open as though it were no more and no less than the door of the nursery cupboard—a violent somersault in Thomas's stomach—and disclosed just an ordinary space, filled with a litter of dusters and tools and oil-cans.

No corpse dangling from the end of a rope.

And really, no reason now why he shouldn't take the next train and carry out his journey according to plan. Thomas, greatly relieved and very grateful to the two men, sauntered, his hands in his pockets, towards the station. The cry of "All aboard!" reached him again as he took his half-price ticket: three-halfpence, the half of threepence. And now he had only a halfpenny left. But he did not bother about how he was to come back all those miles and miles. In actual fact, he was feeling so heroic and jaunty that if he had considered it at all, the return journey presented itself to him as a nice brisk walk.

"All aboard!" The conductor—or was it the captain?—of the train wore naval uniform and a yachting cap. It all seemed to Thomas perfectly in order. He stepped into the front outside seat. They rushed down the pier at a hundred and ninety miles an hour. It was glorious—glorious and very, very cold. So often authority had delivered the warning: "You'll be cold." Now nobody had delivered a warning, and he *was* cold; a pleasant change. The turrets and domes and minarets of the

Eastern city rushed to meet the charging train. Thomas sprang off before it stopped, and did not fall down. He trotted through yet another turnstile—but you could never have too many turnstiles, with their click-click, and stubborn reluctance to revolve except by the full weight of your chest butting at the iron—and stood gazing rather uncertainly at several nautical flights of iron steps with white rails, leading to who knows what of upper decks and look-out bridges, captain's bridge and crow's nest, wax-works and dance-floor and Dripp's Carnival Photographic Studio; confusing and impressive; though this was not an Eastern city, after all, as he had fancied so often from the shore, but an enormous old-fashioned battleship, where at any instant you might meet Nelson strolling, and an enormous fair where a clown might poke his face round any corner.

A little confused now by the multiplicity of adventure, by the crowds of noisy people pushing him this way and that, by the glitter, mostly orange and pink, of the stalls that sold Clifford's Bay Rock and bananas and cups of tea, and displayed great bowls of orangeade and raspberry Kola, Thomas stood still and had qualms. Perhaps, after all, King William had not meant him to come as far as this, unprotected. Three or four people—no, six; no, only four, but for a moment they looked like at least seven or eight—came rocking towards him, arm-in-arm, all talking together loudly. They were coming from the waxworks. "What's the matter with Crippen?" they chanted, and then answered themselves emphatically: "*He's* all right!" thumping down on the "*He*." They loomed ominously larger as they drew nearer. Thomas was frightened; too frightened to remind himself that they were just people, people enjoying them-

selves, people on the pier. He thought they were going to knock him down and trample over him and not mind. Without waiting for catastrophe, he turned and ran in another direction, banged into more people—"Here, you kid, look out! Think you're Kid Berg?"—People coming round the corner of every building . . . Grandpa was right, too damned crowded . . . Thomas ran blindly towards the only deserted portion of the pier, a dark damp cave under the upper deck, noisy with that special hollow noise of water sucking at the foundations of the pier, and waves gurgling up between the boards, receding again, leaving them shiny and wet. Unreal footsteps drummed above him; a rusty chain clanked near by. You were too close to the sea, here; much too close. Even when you were actually *in* the sea, bathing in secluded coves beyond the beach of Clifford's Bay, you were not so close as now, clutching at the rail of the flight of iron steps which led dimly down into nowhere at all—a nowhere encrusted with weed and barnacle, sounding with black oozy echoes.

When you were digging in the sand, up to the middle of July, or after the fourteenth of September, and you had dug a small pool, and you had dug another small pool, and then you joined them, the result was, curiously and unmathematically, a pool much bigger than two pools; a pool as big as a pond, as big as a lake, as big as the ocean. So now his new panic, overflowing, ran into the old perpetual panic which was in his home, and was never allowed to leave the children alone: the panic of Them, which you could never quite forget, because it was shared, created indeed, by the grown-ups in the house, Grandpa and Grandma, Father and Nurse. How could you forget to be afraid when they kept on reminding you?

Except, sometimes, in the winter. Thomas loved the winter, when he was never told to come here and come away from those people and don't get into crowds.

And now he had been in a crowd, far out to sea, and a whole train journey away from dull safety and the Cliff House; and unless he wanted to go back into the crowd again, he had to remain down here, in this dank cave of hollow, sucking loneliness. Which was worse? Dimly it occurred to Thomas that he would have been always, and quite naturally, afraid of the place he was in now; so that the crowds were to be preferred, for he might equally naturally have liked them, had he not always been externally prompted to find them perilous. So he struggled back into the light and tore up a ladder stairway that led from the nautical "upper deck" to an even more nautical sort of look-out place, white-painted and roped-off and official at the extreme end of the pier; the kind of place that gave him confidence, for here he might easily find Grandpa, or the captain of the ship, or a telescope . . .

The door was locked, and Thomas clambered down again, and paused, shy but interested, in the open doorway of Dripp's Carnival Photographic Studio.

A small imitation aeroplane stood outside, and the wall was hung with strips of postcards of past clients in fancy dress. The most popular costume seemed to be the Mexican cowboy, and there was an enlargement of a particularly good cowboy photograph, but there were notices which said that Dripp's had over two hundred costumes for you to choose from: naval uniforms, Scotsmen, policemen, firemen. Another notice purported to be in the voice of a mother, asking: "What shall I do with my baby? He won't keep still," and was answered wisely with the

advice: "Take him to Dripp's. They're marvellous with children."

Gradually, fascinated by what he saw, Thomas advanced step by step.

An operation was just reaching its crisis. Mr. Dripp was a pair of legs under a black cloth, behind a tripod. Ariel to his Prospero, his daughter, Sapphire, dashed about, grouping and directing. She was a plain, pale, thin little girl of fourteen, with a fiery quality about her which her father lacked, although in appearance she was just as nebulous as he, in spite of the finery she wore: a mature black satin dress, dull with grubbiness; a greasy black velvet jacket; necklaces; three rows of bangles; and kirbi-grips in her hair. She seemed to possess that admirable ability to take an interest in her work, recommended nearly always in vain to all girls at school.

Two friends were posed in front of the Houses of Parliament, let down from one of the many rollers slung from the ceiling. The principal of the pair, a mournful young woman with bad teeth and no vitality, was obviously surprised and a little ashamed to find herself in Spanish costume, with castanets in her hand. Her friend, in bathing costume, was more cheerful, but irrelevant to the general composition. Even Sapphy seemed to feel this, because she remarked that reelly the bathing-costume girl ought to have had a back-cloth of rocks and a lighthouse. They *had* a back-cloth of rocks and a lighthouse, but that wouldn't have done for La Carmencita. "And you wanted to be together, didn't you? I'd lift that left arm a little more, if I was you. Yes, right over your head, like as if you was dancing. There, you look fine now! You do, honest. All right, Dad?"

Mr. Dripp appeared, small and insignificant and weedy,

and stood ready beside the camera, the bulb in his hand. The tired woman in Spanish costume took his appearance as a signal that the ordeal was over, and moved dreamily out of focus. She was still wearing her own heavy, rather down-trodden brown shoes. Sapphy dashed forward and hauled her back, while her friend in bathing-costume laughed heartily at the mistake. "I never, Maud! You *are* soft. Anybody'd think you'd never been took before!"

From Maud's expression, it was certain that she hoped she would never be took again. Once more she listlessly raised her arms into the orthodox castanet arabesque. Sapphy poured forth a fresh stream of adjuration and encouragement, and the photograph was taken. "All over," said Mr. Dripp, in an earnest, comforting manner. Maud gave him a melancholy smile, Maud's friend pattered out three shillings (for six postcards) on the counter, and promised to call back the next day to fetch the results; and the two sidled self-consciously away into an inner dressing-room, which already seemed full and bulging with human shapes.

And still no one bothered to take any notice of Thomas, in the doorway. Sapphy, indeed, was in a perfect whirl of activity. There might have been a dozen of her, rushing purposefully between the studio and the inner room, catching up now an armful of de-napped top-hats, now a bunch of canes.

Thomas's gaze roved dizzily among the dozens of dirty fancy-dresses hanging limply from their pegs along two walls of the shed. He rather thought—as far as he was capable of thinking—that he would like, himself, to put on a fireman's array, and sit in the aeroplane outside, and be photographed like that. Then a revulsion of feeling seized him. He decided that no thank you, he did not

want to wear any of those clothes, even though they were firemen's and policemen's and Red Indians' and cowboys' and clowns'. The same touch of horror was on him as he had experienced hours ago and miles away, at the moment of the execution, when the victim had dropped through the ground and left only the tightened rope to show he was still there. And then again, when he had fled from the menace of the people coming out of the waxworks, and had stood in that isolated, chilly, blowy cavern under the sound of thumping feet. And contradicting the legend that Dripp's were marvellous with children, he would have run away then and there, had he not been compelled by sheer astonishment to remain staring at the grotesque procession, ushered by Sapphy, which now gurgled into the studio from the room beyond.

A fat lady upholstered as a Red Cross nurse, with a pair of surgical scissors and a scrap of gauze bandage in her hands, was followed by a fat man dressed as a vicar; and after a pause—"Where are the girls? 'Ere they are! 'Ere come the girls!"—three (or was it four? or six?) females in black and white frilly trousers, wearing the top-hats, swinging the canes and smoking cigarettes very amateurishly.

"And what are *you* supposed to be, I'd like to know?" continued the vicar, chaffing them. "Easy enough to see what Mum and me are dressed as, but you——"

"Go on! We're cab-array: I'm Marleen!" And one of the girls, with a sense of her part, sang recklessly:

"Falling in love again,
Never wanted to,
What am I to do?"—

"Now then!" cried Sapphy. She lined them up with as much difficulty as racehorses, and commanded them in a sterner voice than she had used with the Spanish lady, to keep steady, to smile and not to bite the lips. They continued, however, to exchange repartee, to bite their lips, and not to keep steady. Steadiness was, in point of fact, difficult for them, after a lunch enjoyed at Ye Old Silver Sausage-Grotto on the parade.

The vicar stood in the middle, property glasses pinching the end of his nose, finger-tips pressed together, a Marleen hanging on each arm. The ultimate moment when the photograph should have been taken was put off, first by his saying to one of the girls: "Parlay voo frongsay?" and whispering into her ear, so that she said: "Oo, lay *off*!" a great many times, and then by his bursting into a prepared and fluent sermon. The Red Cross nurse said hurry, because she'd got an urgent confinement case, at which Sapphy obligingly laughed, but Mr. Dripp remained serious. Sobered by his disapproval, with a supreme effort they all kept still for a second.

Then again came the comforting formula: "All over!"

They shouted in chorus: "It's a boy!" broke out of the group, and surged forward, crying, "How did we look?"

"Fine!" repeated Sapphy. "You looked fine. You did, honest." And still shouting and laughing and banging each other about, the company filed back into the dressing-room to shed their disguises.

Sapphy and her dad exchanged glances. The latter shrugged his shoulders. "That's the sort of stuff you have to listen to," remarked Sapphy, and Mr. Dripp assented with resignation: "An end of the season party, I should say. What's next? The Two Heads with Crab?"

The vicar returned, having removed his hat, glasses and

coat, struggling with the stud at the back of his dickey, and asked Mr. Dripp to undo it. Then he retired again.

"Look, who've we got here?" asked Sapphy, catching sight of Thomas.

CHAPTER II

MISS NELLIE BURTON had only arrived three days ago to live with her cousins, the Leighs; and was still wondering, at tea-time on the day preceding Christopher's twelfth birthday, which of them was to be her most intimate friend; the friend, that is to say, with whom she could trot about companionably, and share the day's pleasures and minor troubles. Nellie's troubles rarely exceeded her joys, for she was a cheery little soul. She had looked forward to this type of companionship more than to anything else, coming down south to make her home, for the first time, with a large family. For hitherto she had lived with her brother Humphrey, at Stone Crag, in the north. She had been alone a great deal, for there were no others in the home, and Humphrey was engrossed nearly always in his books. Now poor Humphrey was dead, and Nellie had been delighted when the invitation had come for her to live with her cousins at Clifford's Bay.

She did not think that Colonel Leigh would be her most intimate friend, running over the possibilities in her mind: "Because he's in a way too military still, even though he is retired; and I suppose it can't be Cousin Alec, because he's famous, and doesn't live here. Besides, men don't very much enjoy doing the things that we enjoy best."

There were two other sons, Gordon and Bernie; the Leighs had had four sons, three of them alive; but Gordon, the children's father, the only widower in the

group, lacked the balance and serenity that Cousin Nellie subconsciously demanded in her chosen companion. He was, no doubt of it, fussy, fussy and sad and a bit strange, so that she felt a curious relief when he went away on business yesterday; and she thought that the children were relieved also. But that must be her silly imagination, of course, if they loved their father; and there was no doubt that they did, especially Sheila.

The Leighs appeared to be always leaving and arriving; Bernie, the youngest son, came back this morning. Bernie had been the friendliest of them all, so far. In fact, he had remarked to her the first time they were alone: "You and I will have to be friends, Cousin Nellie; we're both a bit out of it, in this house." But how funny! It was very, very sweet of Cousin Bernie, but he must have thought her unhappy, which she was not, and said it only to comfort her, for he was not out-of-it at the Cliff House. On the contrary, he was his mother's favourite; Nellie had even thought once or twice that it was wrong of Cousin Violet to show her preference so clearly. However, Bernie was the delicate one, and mothers always liked the delicate one best, even though Cousin Alexander was the tallest and the most famous. How nice for Cousin Violet to have a tall husband and three tall sons, always in and out of the house! Sybil, her only daughter, was tall, too. Nellie was still not sure, even after three days had passed, whether Cousin Violet or Sybil were to prove her own choice of a congenial spirit—"though I suppose I ought to wait for *them* to choose *me*." Well, no hurry; some people didn't care to be hurried. "Cousin Violet is nearer my age. Nearer? How absurd I am! She *is* my age."

. . . And here was tea, with scones and Genoa cake,

brought in by Baxter, the very respectable parlourmaid.

"Would you like to have the children down, Alec, as it's your last evening? Oh no, I forgot, Sheila's playing tennis at the Arundels'."

"I'd like Thomas," said Thomas's Uncle Alec.

Mrs. Leigh took no notice of this. Her youngest grand-child was not an asset at tea-time. He asked too many questions, and waited for the answers. Christopher asked questions, too, but he always answered them himself, rapidly, because he was too impatient to wait for the grown-ups' more measured and carefully thought out statements.

"And that reminds me, Alec: do you mind if Christopher has your room, from to-morrow onwards? It's his twelfth birthday, you know, and he's so tired of sharing with Thomas, and Nurse always in and out."

"I sympathise. She was always in and out when we were kids. It was a good moment when somebody married her and took her off to India."

"Though how they could!" put in the Colonel.

Mrs. Leigh smiled vaguely, collecting even from this stray remark a compliment to herself as a woman and a belle. No one need ever have said over pretty Violet Burton: "How anyone *could*!" Poor Nurse, who had a small hard rigid body, with round dwarfed shoulders! True, somebody had married her, but he was dead, and Nurse's own children were grown up, and she had come back to the Cliff House, where she had looked after Alec and Bernie and Sybil, and the twins, Gordon and— But Mrs. Leigh always slurred over this, in her mind, and hurried on. Well, anyhow, Nurse was looking after Gordon's children, and was more unattractive than ever, and certainly more vigilant. There was desperation

in her vigilance now. And this was her first day out for six weeks. She always refused, and quite rightly, to leave the children in August, even to their Aunt Sybil.

"Then is it all right, Alec, about your room? After all, you're going away, and I don't suppose you'll be here again for another year, except sometimes for golf on Sunday, and you can always have the spare room. I can't understand," she spoke with sudden disproportionate bitterness, "why you choose the most ghastly month of the whole year to come down here for your holidays. It's most perverse of you. It isn't as though one could even go *out* in August."

Dr. Leigh rather deliberately cut his Cousin Nellie a slice of cake.

"I find no difficulty in going out," he said.

Cousin Nellie thought they meant the weather. "Oh, but it wasn't a bit too hot this morning. I had a very nice little trot as far as the bandstand and back. Of course, it's September already, but there were a lot of people out. and I was so pleased when they encored the 'Gondoliers' What a favourite it still is!" She began to hum "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes."

Colonel Leigh exchanged glances with his daughter and his wife. Nellie would have to be told. But how peculiar that her instinct had not revolted of its own accord!

Sybil suggested to her that the East Cliff was much nicer at this time of the year. "It's not crowded," she said, a little breathlessly, stressing the recommendation as though it contained all felicity.

"Oh, but I don't mind crowds. It's so amusing to watch the people, and wonder what they're going to do."

Alec did not have to look at his father and mother to be sure of the expression on their faces. He knew that

expression. It was fastidious and even faintly disgusted, but there was more in it than that. There was rage in it. Heavens! Would they never forget that business of young Hugh's death? Surely, after twenty-five years, one might reasonably expect them to begin forgetting?

It had done none of them any good, this miserable obsession. Look at Sybil, though her grudge against the August crowds was more recent. Alexander looked at Sybil. And reflected how extraordinary it was that during all that Nelson Aubrey period, when she was desiring to attract him in any way which might be permitted to Miss Leigh of the Cliff House, her breast conceivably torn by animal passions which would have made the three Miss Lampeters, for instance, scuttle like rabbits if they had ever had a glimpse of them, how extraordinary that during all that time, Sybil had continued to dress herself as now, and as she always did, in clothes which Alexander found amazing. He could understand that women's clothes should eventually wear out to that flavourless and tepid condition of Sybil's; but how did she manage to acquire them like that, right from the beginning, when they were new? And was it, he wondered, psychological, that their complete insipidity appeared either as though they were trying to subdue a blaze of beauty which was not there, or reproach a tendency to flamboyance, which was not there either? Washing-silk dresses, with nebulous waists and of no very definite colour, lightish but not exactly white, and sports coats of a different colour, beige or grey or a not very interesting green . . . Clothes which were a perpetual reproach to people like La Belle Otéro.

Mr. Nelson Aubrey was a London man, a West End of London man, who had come down every summer to Clifford's Bay, because it was so quaint. He rented a large

house on the Chalk Cliff, for July, August and September, and declared, with almost overdone enthusiasm, that no other view, no other house, no other place could ever win him away. He declared, furthermore, that he was a faithful type, and Mrs. Leigh was sure that he had glanced at Sybil when he said it. Then Clifford's Bay began to be popular with the crowd, and grew too common for the fastidious, and he had ceased to come down. Sybil had not seen him for years; would never see him again. She owed that to the August invasion. Six years ago had been that tennis-party at the Lampeters, when Miss Picton-Porter had announced to the assembled residents that she had spoken that morning in the High Street to Mr. Pendle, the house-agent, standing at his door, and he had told her that Mr. Nelson Aubrey was not coming down this year; that Clifford's Bay had grown impossible in the summer, and that he had discovered a perfect little place in Brittany, which was not overrun by people who screamed and shouted and scattered orange-peel and illegitimately wore Leander blazers. There was a long silence after she had said this, and then Hertha Lampeter had squeaked: "Well, after all, we all feel the same, but it's quite easy to take no notice. And he could always come over to the East Cliff for his sunsets."

Miss Picton-Porter argued, in a voice as gruff as Hertha's was squeaky, that it was easier still to go to Brittany and then see the sunset from where you were. "If he *must* have sunsets. *I* never liked him. But I see his point. We live here, so we can't help ourselves."

The eldest Miss Lampeter tactfully changed the subject, for she was genuinely fond of the Leighs, and it had been so dreadful, the way their poor little Hugh had been drowned. And now for Mr. Nelson Aubrey never to

come down again! She said: "How difficult it must be to *paint* a sunset, I always think. Of course, Turner——"

Turner had been a great help.

"It's different for you," said Mrs. Leigh, whenever Alexander tried to argue the family into a more normal frame of mind over the summer-holiday mob that yearly swelled in size, noise and colour, "It's different for you; you only come down once a year, to stay. I don't count week-ends."

But Dr. Leigh was bothered by noticing that his family's hatred became less and less like indifference. They talked incessantly about the approach of August and the miseries it brought, the recession of August and the miseries it had involved, as though nothing else interested them to anything like the same degree of intensity. Twenty-five years ago, Hugh had been the cause of obsession; six years ago, the loss of Sybil's chance of happiness had added to it. What would come next, he wondered?

"I can't think," he remarked, as casually as possible, passing his Cousin Nellie her second cup of tea, "why, if you hate it so much, you don't go away just during this month. Let the house or shut it up, and go right away, somewhere inland."

He had said this often before; then, always, had followed the articles of the Leighs' obsession. It was the same now:

"We're not going to be turned out of our own home by these people, just because they choose to overrun the place and make it impossible."

And:

"Good God! Go somewhere inland—as though—as though they'd *conquered* Clifford's Bay, and run up their flag? No, we can't prevent their coming, worse luck, in hundreds, but we can at least refuse to run away!"

And:

"Besides, August is the most expensive month of the whole year, everywhere. And why should your father spend good money just to get away from people who've no right to come here at all?"

And:

"Why can't they go somewhere else? Why must it always be here? They're worse here than anywhere. There are more of them than there used to be; far more. And they go and tell each other."

And:

"No, thanks. Even if we have to be kept inside our own house and grounds, that's better than letting these people think they can turn us out!"

Dr. Leigh shrugged his shoulders. "Oh well, if you like to do the Defence-of-Lucknow act each year—'Let's hold the Residency, if it costs us our sanity!'"

"You do exaggerate, Alec."

"I do?"

"Why do you pretend that we're the only people who feel like this? Look at the Arundels and the Talbots and the Lampeters! All the residents——"

"Yes, but they take their lead from you. After all, you're the oldest inhabitants." He smiled at Cousin Nellie, who was looking bewildered at the outbreak, and could not imagine against whom so much hostility was directed. "You know, don't you, Cousin Nellie, that the Leighs have owned Clifford's Bay as their ancestral property for eighteen generations and more. Shall I go on, and make you cry over the sad story of the impoverished squires?"

Cousin Nellie did not know that he was mocking the situation, and replied very gently, lest she might hurt feelings that seemed somehow to be scattered naked about

the room: "No, my brother didn't tell me. But he very often talked to me about you all, when he talked at all, for of course Humphrey was in some ways a very reserved man."

The air of the room became balmier, especially in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Leigh, whose mouth had become prim and cross, as it always did when her eldest son became "sarcastic." But she had been waiting for a reference to poor Humphrey's boyish infatuation for herself, and now at last Nellie was going to oblige. This infatuation had never found its way into an actual declaration, but Violet Leigh was sure, from the fact that he remained a grave and solemn bachelor, and from words he had not quite spoken to her on her wedding-day, and oh—for dozens of other reasons, his faithful steadfast nature, for instance—she was sure that it had lasted unswervingly till the day of his death. In a mood of sentimental silliness, she had named one of her sons Hugh, after poor Humphrey Burton who had loved her, and hoped that everyone would notice it and say "Ah!" tenderly to themselves, seeing in the act one of those beautiful, tender trifles that, like a beautiful autumn morning, quickly over, yet tinge the whole day with beauty. This legend had become family folk-lore, and one of the few advantages—though not even to herself would Violet Leigh have put it quite so harshly—yet one of the few advantages of Cousin Nellie coming to live with them, was that, as Humphrey's only sister and with him all through the quiet, scholarly years until the day he passed away, she would be sure to bring down with her many recollections, trifling yet significant, of how he had remembered Violet, pretty Violet; had spoken of her; not married because of her; sent her a last message, maybe; all of it tribute in the

same way that Robert's "How anyone could!" referring to Nurse a few minutes ago, had also been tribute. So now she said, encouraging Nellie to bring out the watering-pot and freshen up the legend, whose leaves were growing a little dusty: "Yes, I remember poor Humphrey never said very much, but he had a golden nature. One could be so sure of him. He never changed his mind, once it was made up, poor Humphrey."

And at that, forth came the legend, but the wrong one.

Cousin Nellie, alternately shy and a chatterbox, let out, without any idea that the information would not be welcome, that indeed yes, Cousin Violet was right, Humphrey had a faithful nature. There had been a girl, Cicely Mary, whom her poor brother had vainly loved all his life, and to the recent hour of his death. They must often have wondered why he did not marry, but nobody else ever counted to him at all; though, of course, he was very polite to everybody who called, but they weren't very many, because he chose a quiet place on purpose. "I'm afraid that perhaps I oughtn't to say it, but it isn't *quite* true to say that he was very polite, because he wasn't always, and then I knew that he was comparing them with Cicely Mary."

Bernie, who had strolled in during the narrative, and gone straight to the piano, allowed his fingers sympathetically to ramble into his mother's favourite, "Every morn I bring thee violets." She sighed, appreciating his subtle unspoken comfort. "Cicely Mary" was very definitely not "Violet," and the legend of over forty years was utterly destroyed. She murmured: "I always think it's such an affectation to call girls by two names, when one is enough."

Dr. Alexander Gordon Leigh reflected, not unsympa-

thetically, that his Cousin Nellie's innocence over most subjects would not be altogether in her favour in this household. His mother would probably never forgive her. The other residents at Clifford's Bay had hoped that these two would be such great friends, because they must be nearly the same age. It was strange, Alec reflected, that nobody ever expected incompatibility except in marriage. His mother and his Cousin Nellie were clearly incompatible.

Luckily, at this moment, Christopher marched into the room.

"Have you asked yet?" he cried to his grandmother.

"Hallo, young man, want a piece of cake?"

Christopher ignored his Aunt Sybil's offer. He didn't always want cake. Some people thought one always wanted cake. One wanted cake, but not always.

"Granny, have you? Have you asked him you-know-what? You said you would, before he goes. In case he minds. You don't, do you, Uncle Alec? Or hasn't she asked you yet? Granny!"

"Darling, where's Thomas?"

Christopher could not remember where Thomas was. Nor did it greatly matter; but he knew that if he revealed ignorance, there would be more questions, and perhaps even a Fuss, as Nurse was out, and hadn't been out for such ages. So, because there was only one subject of surpassing interest to be settled at that moment, and this question of Thomas might stand in the way of it, Christopher's brain did that extraordinary performance which might be termed the-wish-is-father-to-the-thought, rather than direct lying. It wanted Thomas to be somewhere where Thomas should be, safely and tamely and involving no further complications; so it saw the little brother

sitting at the nursery table, busily employed with his chalks.

"He's chalking," said Christopher; and then, after all, held up his own affairs by vivid improvisation: "He's chalking a picture of a sea-serpent round the lighthouse. The lighthouse is red, and the sea-serpent's green with gold scales—only it's difficult to get gold with chalks. And of course the sea's blue, and there's a ship——"

"But where did he find a picture like that?"

"Oh, I drew it for him. They were talking about a sea-serpent being sighted, up by the coastguards this afternoon, and——"

Colonel Leigh looked faintly worried. The coastguard station was not exactly out of August bounds for the children, for it stood on the safe side of Clifford's Bay, the residents' side. But it was the only spot on that cliff which was occasionally sinister, because They sometimes crossed over from their own territory, and drifted up as far as that, just to have a chat with the coastguards, who had for them all the fascination of something sailor-ish; and coastguards sometimes meant telescopes. The Leighs' nurse knew that it was better to shoo her charges straight along the cliff path at a rather quickened pace, past the coastguards' hut, and not allow them to make the loop round by the little garden laid out with boundaries of white chalk; so how had Christopher evaded her?

"Now, look here, Christopher, you know I've told you often, and so has your father, that we don't like you to go talking to the coastguards. They've no business to encourage it. They've got their job."

Christopher turned white. He suddenly looked much older than his twelve years. "I haven't talked to them for months! You never mind in the winter, and it's nearly winter now!"

"Christopher!"

"I can't remember all the millions of things I mustn't do. The coastguards are friends of mine. They think, if I don't talk to them for months and months, that I'm—that I'm——"

His Uncle Alec, in that dry indifferent way which made one always wonder if he were being an angel on purpose, or just accidentally, now brought back the boy's attention to the question of the new bedroom:

"You can move in now, if you want to, Christopher. I'll just go up first, and sling my things into a suitcase."

"Oh, but Alec, there's no need for you to hurry with your packing. No need at all. You're not leaving till after dinner. Christopher's waited all these years, he can quite well wait until to-morrow."

"Christopher will tell you that he can't."

"Then he must learn to."

Christopher looked round desperately for help. His Uncle Bernie stopped playing, and said, with that touch of imagination and sympathy which, according to his mother, made children and dogs love him: "Wouldn't it be jolly for the little chap to wake up on his birthday morning and find himself for the first time in his new quarters?"

Christopher had not thought of this, for himself; his ardour very rarely expended itself on what would be jolly to-morrow morning. His ardour was always dizzily dancing in the present. But he was quick enough to see that Bernie's appeal was of the sentimental kind that might soften the grown-up heart, where his own: "I-want-to-do-it-now-because-now-is-now," would fail. Already his grandparents began to arrange their faces towards genial indulgence.

"Yes, that's just it, you see!" And immediately lies became truth, and the future became the present, and Christopher saw himself sitting up in bed, in his Uncle Alec's room—his own room now—and noticing with delight how on his birthday morning, of all mornings, the sun burst in a new way through the new window, set in an unfamiliar wall on the left of the bed, instead of straight in front of it.

"It'll be like being born all over again!" he declared. The looks of genial indulgence withdrew themselves slightly.

"Well," argued Christopher, swift to follow that reaction, too, "birthdays *are* when one was born, so one ought to—to meditate upon it."

Alec, on his way to the door, chuckled, and said that, to-morrow morning in his bedroom in Wimpole Street, he would think of Christopher in his old room at the Cliff House, meditating upon birth.

"It'll be ready for you to move in, in about twenty minutes, Chris."

Mrs. Leigh still appeared doubtful. "You see, Nurse isn't in to help him, and Sybil has to drive down to pick up the Lampeter girls for the Red Cross Committee. And even Sheila won't be back just yet, so——"

"I can move my things alone. I'd rather!"

They took no notice of that, but Cousin Nellie volunteered to help, and he said: "Yes, you'll do. Thanks awfully," and changed the subject as fast as possible, so that there should be no reconstruction of plan.

A great deal of Christopher's typical small-boy litter was dropped on the way between the old night-nursery he had shared with Thomas, and his new, splendid and

romantic quarters, hitherto sacred to his famous uncle. He had to keep scampering back to retrieve them, while Cousin Nellie arranged what had already been brought in: clothes; boots; fishing-rods; stamp-albums; a few books; paint-boxes; sand-shoes; gum-boots; jig-saw puzzles; kites; a variety of belts; marbles; pieces of string; several pots of gum and paste; a cricket bat and a sprung tennis-racquet; a ping-pong net without racquets or balls; diabolo sticks without the reel; the beginning of a collection of bugs in lethal jam-jars; rickety objects made out of matches, with glue and cardboard, and achieving no particular sense in their final stage, but still precious, because self-constructed; halma, ludo and a racing-game, all incomplete; the boards belonging to various games stuck together for some purpose connected with one giant game embracing all the rest, going on in Christopher's mind, but not yet clear enough to be shared with others (and Aunt Sybil had said, in her abrupt way, when he had tried to explain: "Well, but wasn't it rather a mistake to spoil all your other games by using the boards before this one was ready?"). Finally, a number of accessories for a small box-camera.

Nellie arranged all these, as neatly as she could, with a good deal of respect and astonishment at their variety and evidences of a virile existence.

"No, look here, not there," Christopher kept on saying; "at least, I don't know. Let's move them all back again and see if they look better. We'll leave Uncle Alec's school groups, I think, don't you? They're not half bad. And some of his books. I shan't want all these shelves. I wish he'd left some test-tubes and a few burners and things. But there wasn't much hope, because he never brings them down here. Only, of course, he had this room ever

since he was about the same age as me, before he went to London, so—I say, Cousin Nellie, that’s Thomas’s. You *can’t* have thought it was mine! No, look here, I say!”

Cousin Nellie apologised. She shook up the patterns in a kaleidoscope which was lying on the bed, saying how fascinating they were.

“Oh well, that’s really Thomas’s, too, but it may as well stay in here, now.”

The kaleidoscope was really Christopher’s, but he was a little ashamed of still liking it so much.

Cousin Nellie thought what a pretty little boy he was, though dreadfully thin, but that might be because he never stopped still for one moment. He looked thinnest from the back, where the hollow at the nape of his neck was somehow deeper and more pathetic than the usual hollows in the nape of small boys’ necks. Thomas was of much sturdier build than Christopher; and Sheila, though gracefully built, was too self-possessed to have the same pathetic appeal. Cousin Nellie mentally selected Christopher as the one who would die, if any of them were to die, and asked him what a certain implement was for.

“Flat-fish spearing, in the winter,” explained Christopher briefly.

Cousin Nellie thought that sounded a cold pastime. Especially with the fish so flat. She said: “I suppose now is the time of year when you’re always shrimping on the beach?”

“Good Lord, no!” Christopher squatted on the floor in the midst of the prevailing muddle, and began nervously piecing together a jig-saw. “We’re not allowed to mess about on the beach in summer. At least, not after the

middle of July. Before that, it's usually not fine enough, or there's school. If we *do* go down, we have to stick with Nurse all the time, and where's the sense in that?"

"I should have thought the winter was far more dangerous."

"Yes. But there isn't the Fuss, in winter."

"Fuss?"

Christopher did not look up from the Death of Nelson in three hundred pieces: but his tone was sharp and tired, both at the same time. Perhaps it was sharp because it was so tired, not like a little boy's at all, thought Nellie.

"No-one's family fusses as much as ours. We're not allowed to go shrimping or bathing or on the pier or to hear the niggers, or—or anywhere. And it's nothing to do with age, either. I mean the Fuss is just as bad now that Sheila and I are older, as it always has been, and just as bad for us as for Thomas. They're silly, they're mad, they're potty!"

"But surely your father——"

And then she remembered, even before Christopher spoke, that she had wondered why her Cousin Gordon was so worried and vigilant over his perfectly healthy tribe of three.

"Father's the worst. And Nurse never stops either, the old devil! 'Christopher! Miss Sheila! Christopher! Thomas! Miss Sheila!' All day long, every time one tries to move. And Grandpa and Granny are just as bad: 'Darling, come away from those children. I'd rather you didn't play with them.'—'Why not?'—'I'd rather you didn't, dear. They're not very nice children.' And: 'Chris, must you go about with just *that* little boy?'—'Why what's wrong with him?'—'Nothing, but he's not

a very nice little boy. You'll catch something. Come along, Christopher, there's a nice quiet walk up on the cliff . . . Darling, not *that* donkey. Yes, I know it's the fastest, but I think this one's just as nice, don't you, and you see, the boy knows us.'"

Christopher's mimicry had that quality of excellence which is inspired by a daily cause for irritation which never leaves the soul time to recover from yesterday's sickness. It was obvious that he, and probably also Sheila and Thomas, were deeply and angrily bewildered by the nagging and clacking, the warning and hushing, that surrounded them.

"Oh well," exclaimed Christopher, jumping up and tumbling his jig-saw pieces back into their box, "it's not for much longer now, anyway. September—in another week or two they'll be all right, and quite sensible for the rest of the year, except over going on the pier; and a fellow can have some fun."

"You have little friends of your own, of course?"

"Oh yes, dozens: Michael and Pamela and Richard and Gerald. And the Maitlands nearly always come down again every Christmas, and we can have them up to the house a lot. If the pond over at Wykeleap freezes this winter, we'll all cycle over every single day and have lots of skating. The Jennings have got bikes, too, and Norman's got a motor-bike, and takes me on his carrier."

But this sounded to Cousin Nellie a hundred times more perilous than shrimping along the beach. She was completely puzzled by Christopher's contradictory accounts. So casual about the skating and the bicycles!

"But does your father allow that? Or Nurse?"

"Oh, Nurse hasn't a word to say. I'd jolly well like to see her trying to stop us. And Father always says yes,

except now and then for Thomas."

"But you said just now that your father was so fussy—I mean, so strict."

Christopher was reaching to one of the upper shelves. He looked at her over his shoulder; a funny look, sparkling, half derisive, as though he were holding some knowledge on a leash, some knowledge that he was half afraid of, himself.

"Only when it's Them," he said.

The door was flung open and the Colonel marched in. He seemed upset.

"How long ago was it that you left your brother chalking in the nursery?" he asked abruptly. Without waiting for Christopher's reply, he went on: "Young rascal, he can't be found anywhere. Your grandmother's very upset. So's Nurse, of course. That's what comes of it."

"Oh dear," cried Cousin Nellie, "isn't he in the garden?" She knew this was foolish, because they would have thought of looking in the garden and calling "Thomas!" several times, before they began to get into a fuss. Fuss—the word caused her to look at Christopher. The boy's expression revealed an intense weariness that surprised her, even after their recent talk; not alarm for his little brother, nor fear at his grandfather's wrath, should he himself be mixed up with Thomas's disappearance; but weariness, as though the alarm and the booted-and-spurred dialogue accompanying it, were so well known to him that he could hardly bear the first signs of its approach.

Nurse, with her hat and coat still on, came stumping up the corridor.

"Look, sir! Look!" she panted. "'Is chalks!" She held out an old cigar box.

"Well, that's not going to help us to find him, is it?"

"And the nursery table clean as a pin, not a thing left spread out or lying about, and these put away neatly where I put them myself after he last used them, too high for him to reach—a month ago it must have been! That's not Thomas, that isn't."

"But Christopher *said*—" began the Colonel.

"He'd say the hind leg off a donkey. He's just been telling his stories again." Nurse seized Christopher by the arm, and shook him. "Now did you or didn't you see Thomas at his chalking, same as you said you did, before you went down to the drawing-room? Because *I* say that he must have been out for hours, with me for once not there to keep an eye, and everybody, thanks to you, thinking him safe and quiet in the nursery. *Now* then!"

"Don't! Let go!" Christopher shrugged his arm away.

Mrs. Leigh had come rushing in, in time to hear the last few agitating lines of Nurse's tirade. Her anxiety rayed into distraction. "Do you mean to say that—oh, my God!" under her breath. "And Sybil not here with the car, so that we can't—Robert, where do you think we'd better look first? Bernie's calling all over the house, in case he's hiding. But Thomas doesn't hide, you know. It's Christopher who's so fond of hiding."

"I'll hide him!" growled the Colonel. "I'll have the skin off his hide, young liar!"

"I'm sure," put in Cousin Nellie, getting nearer the truth than in her good-nature she knew, "I'm sure Christopher didn't mean to tell a lie." She was oddly more concerned with Christopher than with Thomas, in the Fuss. She could not help feeling that Thomas could look after himself, and under the circumstances would

be all right; a feeling which was like one child over another, and separated her from the turmoil and flurry, slightly unjustified, so it seemed to her, of her contemporaries.

For some minutes past, hardly noticeable through the pandemonium centering for the moment in Christopher's new bedroom, Bernie's voice had been heard calling: "Thomas! Thomas! Hi, little chap! Where are you? Come out now. Game's over. Nobody's cross. Thomas!" And that, too, added to the panic; because the reassuring note was over-hearty, and as Bernie afterwards explained, more for his mother's benefit than from any confidence that he felt himself of Thomas's suddenly appearing from a cupboard or from under a bed. As Bernie, too, came along the corridor, both his spaniels, Jess and Lassie, flopping close behind him, Mrs. Leigh turned instantly to him.

"Oh, Bernie! And now Nurse says he wasn't chalking at all, when we thought he was. And—do you think we ought to let Gordon know? But he'll have left the Temple. It's getting so late. Soon it'll be dark, and They——"

"Come, come, Mumsy. Of course it won't be dark for hours yet. Summer time, you know. I wouldn't worry Gordon until we've had the search-parties out. By the time it's dark, of course, the little chap'll be found."

"They're so often just where you least expect them to be." Cousin Nellie was not using her usual common sense over the disappearance of Thomas, but she was too bewildered by the extraordinary state of nerves shared by the whole Leigh family. "Perhaps he's gone for a walk with his Uncle Alec. I've noticed that they seem to be great chums. Or in the kitchen."

But Baxter had said he was not in the kitchen. And Bernie, shaking his head, said decidedly: "No, he wouldn't be with Alec, or he'd have heard me calling, and come out. The little chap's got rather a special fancy for me. And Alec was in here, packing his things, until half an hour ago. His bags are in the hall now."

"Where's Alec himself, though? Perhaps he could be of more use. He's *never* here when——"

"Now, now, Mumsy!"

"Christopher!" shouted the Colonel. "Can you help us in any way? Has Thomas ever said anything about——" He stopped.

"About running away?" finished Cousin Nellie, thinking that was to be the end of the sentence.

"Rubbish! Why should the child run away?"

"Well, then, perhaps if he's gone for a little walk, and lost his way, some nice kind people will bring him home presently. There are so many about, just now. It isn't," she added with a laugh, "as though Clifford's Bay were a lonely spot, like Stone Crag. And Thomas is a friendly little fellow."

Silence in the room.

"No," said the Colonel slowly, with a peculiar look past his wife, past the open door into the corridor, and into the space that lies beyond corridors. "No, it's not deserted."

Suddenly Nurse began to scream. To Cousin Nellie, a newcomer in the household, this was the most amazing incident of the whole amazing exhibition. For the woman had appeared the least hysterical personality that could be imagined, with her squat sturdy body, and squat sturdy boots, and a brisk snappish way of disposing of everyone else's emotions or prejudices, saying frequently: "I've no

patience with them who——”

Directly she began to scream, the spaniels began to frisk round wildly, and to bark, plunging their noses into everyone's faces, their ears flapping, and each one of them seeming to possess at least seven clumsy, affectionate, over-exuberant paws.

Not surprisingly, Dr. Leigh came along and took command of the whole group and the whole trouble.

Christopher, left alone, went on settling his possessions. His hands were shaking, and he dropped more than he picked up. Presently Sheila came in, swinging her tennis racquet.

“Hallo.”

“Hallo. Are you going to sleep in here already?”

“Mm. Scrumptious.” But all that was scrumptious had gone from his preparations.

“Uncle Alec hasn't left yet.”

“He's going to-night. He's packed his things.”

Sheila went on, forcing the casual note: “I beat Johnny Arundel 6-4, 6-5, 6-3, and he played once at Wimbledon. At least, he says he did.”

“I expect he's lying,” said Christopher virtuously. Then he broke through: “By the way, there's a Fuss.”

Sheila sighed, relieved that she had not had to speak of it first: “Don't I know it? Thomas. It's *bad*.”

“They came and did it in my room,” Christopher complained, as though a holy of holies had been desecrated. “Anyone'd think he was dead.”

“I promised I'd help them look. Nurse has got to lie down, and Auntie Sybil's at one of her committees. They've phoned for her, though. You coming?”

“No!” In disgust and contempt at the mere notion that

he should participate in the Fuss. "*Thomas* is all right." And Christopher added casually: "I expect he's on the pier."

Sheila nodded. "Yes, I thought so, too. I was going to get Uncle Alec to come with me on the pier, first of all. Thomas has been wanting to go there quite a lot lately; last year it was the niggers."

"After this," Christopher prophesied gloomily, "Nurse'll never take a day-out again, not even when They're not down here. And Father—oh, Sheila, let's hope and hope and *hope*, hard, harder than we've ever hoped before, harder than prayers, that they'll find Thomas soon, so that they don't have to let Father know. I can't bear it—I simply can't bear it if the Fuss gets worse. And it would, if Father heard that Thomas had gone out by himself on to the pier. I can't bear watching Father if he——"

"Yes. You don't suppose, do you, that Thomas is going to stop out till after it's dark, or all night? Or go home with some of Them?"

"He'd be all right."

"Oh, *he'd* be all right. But Father—and Granny—and Nurse—I think Father'd go mad."

"I think he's mad already."

"Don't!" whispered his sister. They had thought so, often, and each had known that the other had thought so, but to say it was unpardonable; and to go out like Thomas, while They were still about, and stay out, that was unpardonable, too. Not, of course, because it was dangerous or disobedient or anything silly like that, but because it was bound to swell their elders' state of torment, that state of torment which was so horrifying, because it was always there, and the children could see no reason in it. To have to watch your very own belongings, your

father and grandfather, your nurse, grandmother and aunt, getting queerer and queerer—you simply had to do everything you could to stop them, instead of making them worse! Thomas was disloyal. Of course, he was ever so many years younger than Sheila and Christopher, but even then he might have had the sense to join in with them in beating back an impending crisis, instead of drawing it on.

Sheila groped for consolation: "After all," she argued, while her eyes pleaded with Christopher not to show-up the weakness of her self-comforting, "after all, other families are just as bad—well, pretty nearly as bad. The Maitlands and the Arundels."

"No, they're not. I mean, it doesn't start with them. They're only copying Grandfather and Grandma. If they had never started the Fuss, there'd *be* no Fuss. It's because they're the oldest family here."

"Sheila! Sheila!"

"Coming, Grandpa!"

Christopher, with one sweep of his arm, tumbled an entire shelf of his uncle's books on to the ground.

"Christopher, what are you doing?"

"They can be put away in a box somewhere. They're awfully fusty and medical. I want that shelf for my Kiplings."

"*Sheila!*"

"Coming! Christopher, put my racquet in the press for me."

She ran off, graceful and obliging.

CHAPTER III

"Oh, Thomas!" cried his sister Sheila's voice, in fresh, ringing reproach.

But he was doing nothing wrong; simply sitting up at the counter, being shown an album of postcards of ladies and gentlemen in fancy-dress, the best and most fascinating examples of Dripp's art. There was a temporary lull in the studios, so that Sapphy, taking a rest, leant nonchalantly against the counter beside him, every now and then refreshing his inspection with an anecdote of the sitter.

Sheila thanked Sapphy very prettily for looking after her little brother. She explained that they had all been rather frightened, up at Merton Road, at his disappearance; but that she, Sheila, had said all along that she was sure Thomas was quite all right, and that somebody kind would be looking after him. Uncle Alec would be coming along presently—he was searching the ice-cream, Kola and orangeade shops on the front; but she had dashed on, and up the pier. She was sure (again) that she would find her little brother somewhere on the pier.

Sheila Leigh was nearly always sure of everything. She had made the discovery that—apart from the Fuss—life was by no means such a difficult business to handle as adults perpetually made it out to be; in fact, that it was a perfectly easy matter when you were a pretty, intelligent child of thirteen, to manage whatever came along, provided you were not shy or silly, and used tact and good manners. Alexander Leigh found his niece's self-posses-

sion quite devastating. Her voice was so clear, and she was so popular wherever she went. "Sheila's simply marvellous at setting people at their ease," said Sheila's grandmother; and her father was proud of the neat little figure that wore its simple schoolgirl clothes with such slim confidence, and whose bobbed hair curled self-supportingly.

Uncle Alec preferred Thomas, stumpy and sometimes absent-minded.

Sheila now took entire charge of the situation, of Thomas, and of Dripp's Carnival Photographic Studio. She wondered for an instant whether, in recognition of their having sheltered Thomas, she ought to have their photographs taken. So often she had heard her grandmother say: "You must make some return," when somebody had gone out of their way to be nice or to offer hospitality. On the other hand, the studio did not look at all clean, and the fancy-dresses were positively limp with sheer filth. If Sheila had had less charming manners, she would have wrinkled up her straight little nose at the floating odours.

"I do hope he hasn't been a nuisance," she said, her arm flung protectingly round Thomas's shoulder, while he, with the merest wriggle of dissent, went on examining the Carmens and Cab-arrays and the Two Heads with Crab.

Sapphy grinned. "If you could see some of the nuisances we get in here!"

Sheila lowered her tones: "Yes, that's why they were all so anxious. Thomas wouldn't know, but——"

"Not so many about, now," remarked Sapphy. "End of the season. There was one lot in, this afternoon."

"While Thomas was here?"

"Mmm. It's all right. They didn't speak to him. Not They. Too busy getting 'emself up to look like fools."

"I passed ever so many on the pier," said Sheila.

"In less than a week They'll all be gone. Thankful I'll be, too. I'm about worn out. So's Dad. You've got to make your living while you can, but Lord! it's fierce during the rush!"

Sapphy was thrilled at the encounter. She very rarely came in contact with the trimly-belted, well-groomed schoolgirls of the resident side of Clifford's Bay. They did not visit the photographer's at the end of the pier.

Mr. Drripp remained busy developing and fixing, in the other room. Thomas was absorbed in his album. By unspoken consent, Sapphy and Sheila moved a little away from him. . . .

"My grandfather was terribly bothered," whispered Sheila, "when we couldn't find Thomas. He said: 'History repeats itself,' all the way down the hill. That's because of my Uncle Hugh."

"Why, what happened to him?"

"An accident. Oh, it was years ago, when he was only twelve. It seems silly, perhaps, to call him uncle, as he was dead before I was born. But he was Uncle Alec's and Uncle Bernie's and Father's brother, so . . . Christopher's twelve to-morrow. But Thomas is only eight."

Sapphy threw a look over her shoulder towards Thomas. "He'll be all right, if you keep an eye on him. They don't do any *harm*."

"*We* know They don't, but we're always being warned about Them, and kept away from Them, because of Uncle Hugh." Sheila's face showed something of the same strain and weariness as Christopher's, an expression so curiously outside her usual charming range, that it did not seem part

of Sheila at all, but as though some accumulated nerve-fret had imposed it on her.

"Was he, the other little boy, your uncle, was he with Them when he had the accident?"

"Yes. You see, he was always running off and playing with Them, and—and the other three, three of Them, were saved."

"Bad luck!"

"My Grandmother doesn't think it was luck. She thinks . . . We have to live down here, since Mother died when Thomas was born, because of having Grandmother and Grandpa and Aunt Sybil to look after us. But even they aren't as particular as Father."

"Mind you, my Dad's particular, too, in lots of ways Dad is, that you wouldn't hardly think. F'rinstance," Sapphy indicated the drop-scene used by the last comer: a roughly-sketched sea, and in the foreground the figures of a fat lady being pinched by a crab, and an equally rotund man in a striped bathing-dress standing by. Above the figures were holes in the canvas through which clients poked their heads while the photograph was being taken. Underneath was scrawled the legend: "I'M NOT FEELING THE PINCH JUST NOW!" "Dad gets really upset when They want to be took the wrong way round, and tries to argue 'Em out of it. 'No, Sapphy,' he says, 'I won't have it!' But, of course, sometimes when They're obstinate——"

"What do you mean, the 'wrong way round'?"

Sapphy explained that Mr. Dripp's notions of decorum were outraged when the lady and gentleman insisted on changing places, he assuming the female body with the crab attached to it, and she posing her face and her best smile above the form of the man in the striped bathing-dress. "It's just one of the things," Sapphy finished,

vaguely indicating the whole of her parent's moral outlook, and the exact extent of his tolerances.

"Well, I don't think it's very nice, either," Sheila agreed with Mr. Dripp.

A loud chuckle from Thomas broke the spell of this entrancingly intimate conversation. He had found a postcard representing another of Mr. Dripp's back-cloths: a skinny charwoman with an umbrella, holding up her skirt to display striped stockings and man's boots and a petticoat. A smiling head appeared disproportionately large on the shoulders and underneath was badly written: "I FEEL A LITTLE DEVIL AT CLIFFORD'S BAY!"

Sheila started, looked—and a sense of responsibility rushed over her again. What had she been doing? She was here to look after Thomas; and here he was, still in this dirty place where he might catch anything, even from turning the leaves of the postcard album. If Nurse or Uncle Alec had been there, she would not have cared; she might even have pursued this fascinating friendship with Sapphy, for the thrill of it, and because she really did rather like this thin little girl, although she was so different from Joan and Pamela and Anne and all Sheila's other friends. But she had no business to be letting Thomas linger in these not very nice surroundings. If he "caught something," how would she feel then?

She had all the sense of remorse that a Methodist minister would have had, following on a sudden lapse into godless talk!

"I'm afraid we've been taking up a good deal of your time," said Sheila prettily; and paused, uncertain as to correct procedure of farewell, for she was in many ways an exceedingly correct young woman, and anxious to do the right thing. She wondered afresh, if she and Thomas

were not to be photographed, what sort of a "return" she could make to Sapphy for looking after Thomas and giving him shelter. Ought it to be a tip? She had her purse with her. Half-a-crown? Five shillings? pressed in Sapphy's hand, with a quick smile and: "Thank you so much. Please buy yourself something nice with this"?

But the photographer's daughter was not exactly a servant or a waiter, or even an attendant in a cloakroom, "though it's more like that," thought Sheila. Well, then, how was she to arrange matters so that a worldly grandmother (and apart from one vital matter, Sheila admired Mrs. Leigh very much indeed), should not have occasion to say to her: "Oh, Sheila, dear, didn't you think to——?" whatever it was that she ought to be doing. "——Ask her to come up and be thanked?" That was it: "Didn't you think to ask her to come up and be thanked?"

So Sheila suggested that Miss Dripp should come up to the Cliff House, that very evening. "I'm sure my Grandmother will want to thank you in person."

"I've done nothing to be thanked for."

"Oh, but you have!"

"Well, I shan't be through till seven o'clock."

"Well, we don't have dinner till eight, so if we expect you at half-past seven——"

"P'raps. Dunno. Can't be sure." Sapphy became more and more sullen in her endeavour not to voice her strong desire to see Sheila again, anywhere, at any time, and at the cost of any trouble.

"I'll look out for you. Come along, Thomas. You *must* come now. They'll be so anxious." She leant over Thomas's shoulder and closed the book; not, however, without a quick look at a picture which happened to be on the same page as the skittish charlady: a picture

of a man dressed as a Red Indian, with a young woman in kilts, holding a baby with a sailor's hat on . . . "Say thank you to—Miss Dripp, and come along."

"It's all right. He needn't," said Sapphy.

A little way up the pier, Sheila and Thomas were met by their Uncle Alec.

"So there you are, young man. I've been looking for you in the Waxworks."

"I don't like waxworks," explained Thomas; "I was—"

Sheila cut in: "Luckily, he was quite all right, Uncle Alec. I thought perhaps he might very likely have come down to the end of the pier to watch the fishing, so I dashed after him, and discovered him being looked after by some quite kind decent people at the photographer's. He's very much ashamed of himself, so we won't say any more about it, will we, Thomas? And he's simply longing for his supper, aren't you, Thomas?"

Christopher read the neatly-pencilled pages, standing up by the book-shelf. Then, gradually, absorbed, he let himself slip to a squatting position on the floor. Later, without raising his eyes, he dragged himself along nearer the window to the light.

They were in his Uncle Alec's writing, hardly less mature then than now when he wrote out prescriptions for, as Grandma said, all the best people in London. Christopher had found the thin black shiny notebook when he was clearing the shelf for his Kiplings, almost directly after the others had left the house in search of Thomas. It had been among about a dozen others for which Alexander had no further use, containing lecture-notes made during the time when he was studying

medicine; and Christopher would not have looked at it if it had not fallen open on the floor, so that his eye was caught by a paragraph:

"As a child, one was never told, then, what was wrong. Usually nurses and parents do not know themselves. Few people definitely know. They merely suffer from a diffused uneasiness concerning this alien race that appears inevitably once a year and always at the same time, as though commanded and withdrawn by an inaudible cadence; appears and conquers Clifford's Bay, and melts away again."

Then he read on, only stopping to flick the leaves backwards to the beginning, to see if there were any clue to his uncle's age at the time of writing what was headed so strangely: "NOTES AND DATA FOR THESIS ON THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF A CERTAIN OBSCURE RACE TO BE OBSERVED AT CLIFFORD'S BAY." From the date, Christopher deduced that Alexander Gordon Leigh had been seventeen.

It might have been about an hour after he had found the notebook, when Sheila entered, still in her white tennis-frock.

Christopher rushed at her.

"Thomas? Have you found him? Is he all right?"

"Of course he's all right. He *was* on the pier." Sheila stared in equal astonishment at her brother's agitation, and at his subsequent immense relief. For she and Christopher *knew* that Thomas would be all right, *knew* that the crowds would do nothing to him, and that the only element of misery in the whole affair was the impetus it would add to the usual old sickening Fuss. Her eye fell on her own tennis racquet still lying out of its press: "Oh, pig! You might have remembered. Christopher!" sharply, for he had gone back to his reading. "You can't

see any more. You'll spoil your eyes," said Sheila primly. "Do stop!"

He looked up at last. His eyes were blazing, his body taut, his very voice strung up, vibrating with a sort of unholy triumph mixed with fear.

"It's all true, Sheila. Every single word that they've ever said in a Fuss and we've so wished they wouldn't. Uncle Alec's got it all written down."

"*Christopher!* No, I don't believe it."

She flung herself on the ground beside him, under the window, and pressed up close, pulling the black notebook towards her so that she too could read it, for Christopher would not let it go.

"What is it? Where did you find it? Christopher, he *can't*—Uncle Alec? Why, he's a famous doctor. People go to him about—about symptoms."

"Well, and this *is* all about symptoms. Though, as a matter of fact, he wasn't a famous doctor when he wrote it; he was only seventeen. But if Uncle Alec believes it, it's all the more true, just because he does understand symptoms and enjoys fiddling about with them and fitting them in. The Fuss—it's been awful, but it wasn't about nothing. They *are* a different race. They may look the same, but they're as different as they can be. Perhaps they don't even exist except when they're at Clifford's Bay in the summer. No, don't argue, Sheila—you can read, can't you? Read it. Quick. Then," said Christopher slowly and impressively, "you'll simply *have* to believe that Father and Nurse and everybody is right!"

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CHAPTER IV

NOTES AND DATA FOR THESIS ON THE ORIGIN AND NATURE
OF A CERTAIN OBSCURE RACE TO BE OBSERVED AT CLIFFORD'S
BAY: BY ALEXANDER GORDON LEIGH

THE Augustans are always worse round the edges; clotting wherever there is water. That might point to the fact that there is so much water where they come from, that they cannot be content without it, and naturally swarm first to the coastline and the sea; then to rivers, lakes, ponds, cascades; you can even see them clustered thickly round every fountain. But I am inclined to hold, on the other hand, that such aquatic tendency might equally be caused by a habitat surrounded by dry desert, mountains, arid ranges of land; and that they are allowed this much compensation once a year.

Who allows them? No one knows.

The next logical step from wondering if there be water where this invading race comes from, is obviously to wonder whether the Augustans come from anywhere at all. There is one school which believes they materialise out of the air, and dissolve into the air again. But the minds which cling to this fantasy are of the type that prefer to make it easy for themselves. It argues a lack of imagination in real people that they cannot imagine the life of the Augustans, nor how Augustans can exist when they are not under our very noses; so that the legend has grown up that they do not exist at all, except during their one month of the year.

For if that were the case, surely we should see them *gradually* appear, and *gradually* dissolve, and they would remain solid during only that one month. But, on the contrary, the Augustans render special jubilant celebration to the ceremony of arrival, and parade in noisy woe at their departure in batches: "Olive oil!" they cry, meaning, so one may interpret their peculiar jocund idiom: "*Au revoir!*"

You cannot explain a whole race by considering them as though they were Alice's Cheshire Cat, capriciously forming and disintegrating among the trees. A more reasonable school visualises them with a land of their own, a kingdom built perhaps by the formulas we understand, perhaps wholly and incomprehensibly different. For it is not as though they arrived haphazard. They are regular and rhythmic as the tides. They take it for granted that they are expected, and that they are welcome. That is ironic or pathetic, according to your viewpoint. For definitely it must not be thought that the Augustans have ever been in the least degree antagonistic to real people. On the contrary, they assume that they are as welcome in Clifford's Bay as children on a merry-go-round, provided that each child has its threepence. This, in fact, is what makes their advent so peculiarly sinister; sinister in origin, if not in behaviour: They have money; they can pay their way, and in our currency. Possibly, where the Augustans come from, there is no need for the coins which they so mysteriously acquire in the currency temporarily most useful to them; so they can squander at will. Certainly, they are not mean.

And they look like real people, with tiny significant differences; and wear more or less the same clothes.

A fleet of Phœnicians invading Clifford's Bay every

year, tendering barbaric coins or bulky objects of barter, might be a phenomenon indeed; but a phenomenon which could ultimately be traced and investigated. But the Augustans are not visitants from past history; nor, like the Lemmings, a race of migrating animals, so why have they never been boldly questioned as to their origin and habits: why have people, real people, unanimously adopted an unspoken policy of keeping their voices hushed on the subject, refraining always from speculation? Speculation is dangerous—yes, but why?

There are so many of them.

There are so many Augustans, and you can never tell how many. You cannot actually count them. Sometimes even while you are watching them, they seem to multiply. You think there are ten, and often you find there are twenty. They thicken and thin again as you watch. You can never, as with real people, say: "There are seven in that party," for it might have been fifteen, or it might have been thirty. Their numbers are never static, whatever they are doing. If six of them go into a grotto, they are quite liable to come out twenty-six. This is the underlying horror of: "Never has Clifford's Bay been so thronged—" (etc.).

For you can never tell what would happen if they stopped being good-natured, and became angry. Prayers for a fine August—who has not heard them? "Let's hope we'll have plenty of sun in August!" But secretly that relates to the Augustans. They hate and dread being pent-up; they are a claustrophobic people.

Thus it is likewise important that the Augustans shall never learn that they are in any respect different from real people. If they choose to be blatant and hearty, you either avoid them, as the residents do; or hasten to

acquiesce in as blatant a heartiness as the soul's shrouded terror will permit, as the townsfolk do.

Whether they secretly know the difference themselves, or whether they never dimly suspect it, is a matter which could be unendingly argued; pulled this way and that, like an old slipper left among a troop of lively dogs. My theory, that they do not know, but subconsciously suspect their transience, I base on their pathetic mania to buy up souvenirs, to carve their names, to cluster round antiquities, to call to each other all day long. Surely that would indicate at least consciousness of being—not unreal in the dimension of space, but in the dimension of time?

Every Augustan has twelve times more energy than a normal person. They collect it during their hibernating months. Collect it from where? Who knows? Ask an Augustan? Ask him? But you cannot ask Augustans. It might be dangerous.

As a child, one was never told, then, what was wrong. Usually nurses and parents do not know themselves. Few people definitely know. They merely suffer from a diffused uneasiness concerning this alien race that appears inevitably once a year, and always at the same time, as though commanded and withdrawn by an inaudible cadence; appears and conquers Clifford's Bay, and melts away again.

Infection, Question of: It has been observed that we can be infected with Augustans' diseases; the point not yet investigated is, can they be infected with ours? "Come away, or you'll catch something nasty," is a phrase commonly heard among children's nurses on this side. Must listen for it among mothers and elder sisters, on the Augustan side.

The Augustans definitely arrive at Clifford's Bay. I

have made a special note of it, from observation, that they do not materialise out of space, but are seen arriving. Most of them write beforehand from addresses which have an illusion of being real, to engage their rooms—"The same rooms we had last year." They are very fond of the same rooms. It gratifyingly helps to establish their recurrence. They tell real people with pride: "Yes, we're in the same rooms, you know."

Outward manifestations of what is annual and what is perennial in this race:

The Augustans do not, as has hitherto been vaguely imagined, remain in block for a whole month, but each one only for a fortnight's segment of the month. Thus, an Augustan or an Augustan party or an Augustan family who arrived, say, on August 7th, would depart, most probably, on August 21st. I have tested this theory exhaustively by records and enquiry, and have rarely found an instance to contradict it.

In the class of perennial variation of the Augustans from the real person, we find, also, the extraordinary Augustan preference for food of which a part can be discarded and thrown aside, such as: oranges (the peel), prawns (the head, not always legs and tail), winkles (the shells). To the same peculiar satisfaction in selection and rejection may be attributed their liking for food in cartons; ice-cream and potato-salad; in bottles: ginger-beer, cream soda, and Kola; in paper bags: doughnuts, buns, potato crisps; in tins: corned beef, and sardines. Naturally, this creates a litter wherever they go, and the litter, far from displeasing them or causing sensations of guilt, can be entered as part of their enjoyment.

And here we find one reason, natural, but fundamentally unjust, for the resentment which their invasion causes

among the permanent inhabitants of this town, who believe that the Augustans find a wanton pleasure in disfiguring beautiful places. It cannot be disputed that their special fondness for antiques, ruins, old castles, very old trees, and Ye Olde Cottage Tea Rooms, is peculiarly contradicted by their inability to prevent themselves from defacing these things they love, by the untidy litter we have already mentioned, and by carving their names, even inscriptions and dates, wherever there is space and opportunity.

(Marginal note: The author has personally ascertained that the carved names remain after the Augustans have gone.)

I gather, therefore, that the Augustan race are faintly aware and dimly uneasy regarding their difference from real people; that they are stirred by apprehensions of their transient nature; and in a queer, wistful, I cannot but say, to my mind rather a pathetic manner, they seek to drive away these doubts and to persuade themselves that they *are* real, by the sight of their own inscriptions, and by the view of their own discards from objects of which a portion is retained inside their own bodies. For we will assume that they go through the same normal assimilative process as real people.

We shall find other symptoms besides these, betraying their desperate, their fundamental need for reassurance as to their own reality; a need which, once recognised, should prevent us from giving way to the general style of superficial irritation.

To return to their pathetic passion for permanence: every shopkeeper catering for the Augustan invasion, can tell you that his larger sales are for what are called, I believe, "Souvenirs"—small objects embossed with a local

coat of arms or merely with the name of Clifford's Bay, with, perhaps, some nauseating sentiment attached. They are of no discoverable use, except to take away to the Augustans' own world—always postulating that they *have* a world of their own—as something concrete to prove their brief incarnation here.

A further observation on their predominating passion for water is the fact that they are curiously unfamiliar with its properties, and are noticeably clumsy in the handling of boats. They swim, but not well, and obtain from bathing the minimum of confidence combined with the maximum of enjoyment. Their total inability to grasp the system of tides, even when clearly handed to them by chart, is frequently a source of danger to them. This passion for water provokes their great respect for sailors.

They are easily taken in by anyone wearing a peaked cap.

The main theme of my inquiry is: the effect of invasion on residents; the owners (sic) not only of the land, but also of the sea and the air, round Clifford's Bay.

The conclusions at which I arrive must be, and shall be, a determined answer to the questions: Who are this strange invading race which appear among us every year? What justification have we for considering them potentially dangerous? Who are the Augustans, and where do they come from?

CHAPTER V

"WELL?"

Christopher's eyes were fixed, sparkling, on Sheila's face, unwilling to miss her reactions, whatever they might be; frightened, relieved, incredulous.

"Well," echoed Sheila, closing the notebook. "Now, look here, Christopher, I suppose this is the most important thing that's ever happened to us. So don't let's jig about and rush round and lose lots of it. Let's talk about it quietly. Let's see," continued Sheila, echoing partly the tone of the thesis, and partly her most admired history mistress: "Let's see exactly what we've got, and where we are."

"Then you *do* believe it now? Every scrap of it! You *do* believe They're not real like us?"

Christopher's voice rang out exultantly, making no effort to restrain himself according to his sister's injunctions. For although his Uncle Alexander's corroboration of the need for a Fuss had definitely proved him and Sheila wrong in their resentment towards it, yet it was blessed to be proved wrong, for the sake of knowing that one's own family, one's own father, particularly, and one's grandfather, were not nearly off their heads, as had been his ghastly fear, but on the contrary, in their prudent, elderly fashion, were perfectly justified in every aspect of the Fuss; justified in all their precautions. It was only to be wondered at, that everybody's parents at Clifford's Bay did not behave in the same way, confronted by this thrilling, this appalling peril of the recurrent invasion.

A mysterious race, with mysterious and unpredictable impulses. But perhaps other people's families at Clifford's Bay did not know. Perhaps, indeed, none of the Leighs quite clearly knew, except Uncle Alec. Otherwise they would surely have taken Christopher, as the eldest boy, into their confidence in the matter, instead of merely maddening all three of the children with vague warnings and heart-rending restrictions. But, oh, how heavenly, how scrumptious and heavenly, to know at last that your own family, in your own home, which ought, above all things, to be a normal sanctuary containing reasonable adults, *was* normal, and *was* reasonable. Who cared now that the mystery lifted from the inmates of the Cliff House had been transferred to the crowd of August visitors? That was not frightening or sinister—that was just thrilling and as it should be: safety at home, danger abroad. That was normal, if you like.

Christopher wanted to find out more and more about the Augustan madness, in the same proportion as he had formerly been anxious to hear and see less and less of what looked like insanity at the Cliff House.

He had no need to explain all this to Sheila. She was equally radiant with relief:

"Of course, I do see now, that all the Fuss has been necessary. I shall have to do it with *my* children, if we live at Clifford's Bay. I wonder why other people's fathers here, don't worry as much as ours? Perhaps ours knows more. Perhaps he's—what's the word?—something like initials——"

"D.T.'s," suggested Christopher brilliantly. "They're initials. You mean you think Father drinks?"

"Oh dear, you do rush off so!" With difficulty she held him back from his new and fascinating notion. "No, of

course Father doesn't drink," indignantly. "No, initiated, that's what I meant, perhaps through what happened to Uncle Hugh. Initiated. Like secret societies. Let's have a secret society and find out lots more!"

Christopher jumped up, bounced on the bed, threw his sandshoes up in the air. Then, with a feeling that such action was too boisterous for the nervous mystery of their conversation, he subsided on the floor again, his thin freckled hands tightly hugging his thin bony knees.

"I *am* being serious, Sheila, honestly. I—I think it's our duty to take up all this stuff just where Uncle Alec stopped, I suppose because he hadn't time and had to pass exams and walk about hospitals. It's our duty," he repeated, nodding emphatically, and trying to hypnotise her with a good word.

Sheila, trying to retain her sagacity and logic, acquiesced in the duty theory: "After all, our Uncle Hugh was drowned by Them, and that gives us more than any of the other children round here a special responsibility towards the future."

"Yes, doesn't it? Awfully." Christopher's eyes dilated with slow terror. "I'd forgotten about Uncle Hugh. Not that he seems like an uncle, does he? When he never gets any older than twelve."

"You'll be twelve to-morrow."

"Yes. Sheila, do you think They'll drown me?"

"Not if we keep away, and we have to, anyway. Look at the Fuss if we don't. Thomas is getting it now."

"Look here, ought we to tell Thomas about Them being a different race?"

Sheila considered the question: "If They're different, They're not safe. And if They're not safe, you never know. And if you never know, Thomas oughtn't to go

near Them again. It was all very well up till now, when we believed They were jolly, ordinary people, the same as us, only noisier; but we've had our warning. They may be safe to each other, but not to us."

"Oh, Sheila, *think!* Think! A strange race, coming to conquer Clifford's Bay every summer, long before we were born, even. And then going away again, and coming back, always the same ones. *Are* They always the same ones? I forget. We can find that out. We can find out millions of things! Dates, Uncle Alec calls them."

"Data," Sheila corrected. "That's the plural of dates."

"Oh, Sheila, *think!* I feel as if I were all on flaming fire and burning up. Because Gulliver's only a book, but this is *real*, that the Augs aren't real."

"Augs?"

"I can't call them Augustans every time, like Uncle Alec. It would take years. Augs, because they come in August—it's the same thing."

"They don't exactly come only in August, do they? We ought to be accurate, if we're going to be a society. They come *for* August. Lots of them begin near the end of July."

Christopher grinned, leant forward, and against the woodwork of the window, rapped out seven beats:



Augs' Tattoo.

Sheila nodded: "Yes, that's it. Simply all over the place. It's the first sign of the Augs. They do it with their

motor-horns on the baby cars."

"And beat it out with their feet on the pier."

"And little boys do it on railings with their wooden spades."

"It's like a cheeky sort of conversation, with 'Shut up!' at the end. Sometimes the baby cars do the first part, and a tram or a charabanc does the 'Shut-up!' bit."

"It's the Augs' battle-cry!"

"Perhaps it's their National Anthem!"

Sheila and Christopher beat out the rhythm in unison on the floor. They beat it out again and again, unable to stop. . . .

Thomas came in and asked, "What's that?" and before Sheila had time to decide whether Thomas ought to be brought into the secret, or merely protected in his blind ignorance, Christopher had told him all about it. You could not stop Christopher once he was in spate. Thomas's eyes grew momentarily rounder at the account of the discovery of his Uncle Alec's Rough Notes for a Thesis, and from then onwards he listened with more respect than he usually rendered to his elder brother and sister.

"And so," finished Christopher, "we've decided that we'll form a secret society and carry on with this work where he left off, because you never know when it might come in useful to have followed Augs about, and got all the information about them there is. It'll be terribly thrilling, you see, because this is *real*, not a game. Uncle Alec was seventeen when he wrote his notes, and he was only at the beginning. I expect he'll be bucked to death when he hears that we're following up his preliminary 'vestigations, though we won't tell him until our dossier's complete."

Thomas did not bother about "dossier." He only said:

"We'll be able to do precious little vestigations now," his brain still laden with memory of what had recently been happening to him downstairs; the injunctions, limitations, liens, penalties for infringement, watching briefs, tightening of borderline confines, consolidation of frontiers. "You're both to go downstairs presently, to Grandpa."

"Oh," said Christopher, and "Oh," said Sheila. They both sighed, and stared at Thomas reproachfully.

"I don't care. I enjoyed the pier," said Thomas. Then with a memory of the British Execution, the people who came rocking and rolling out of the waxworks, and the cave under the top deck, where the hollow waves washed up between the boards, he added: "Most of it."

Sheila murmured: "At least Father isn't at home. It's worse when he's at home, because he's so frightened himself."

"Well, we know now: he's frightened of what They may do; frightened that They'll get us."

"They never *do* get people," from sensible Thomas.

"They got Hugh, and he was Father's twin. I expect that's why he feels it so much. Twins sort of tug at each other. I've heard Nurse say so to the Arundels' nurse." Christopher's imagination gave a leap, and landed him, as it always did, beyond the boundaries of sense. "Perhaps they've got a special down on our family!"

"Parlong de something else, maintenant, devant le petit frère."

"I don't want to talk of something else," whispered Christopher, unheeding Sheila's maternal diplomacy, his glowing eyes, green in the sunlight, grey in the shadow, fixed on the window, and on Clifford's Bay beyond the window, and on all he could not see of Clifford's Bay, so

packed now with fearful enchantment. "We must find out even if they try to prevent us!"

"Grandpa says that if anything of this sort happens again, he's going to send us all three away; to a school inland, he said. Till Christopher goes to Marlborough."

"That would spoil everything, if we were sent away now. We'll have to be careful."

"Look here——" And having said that much, Thomas came to a dead stop.

"Well? Go on."

"Why don't you get that photograph-girl to find out things for you? She gets crowds of people who want to have their photos taken, all day."

Christopher and Sheila looked at each other.

"What photograph girl?" asked Christopher.

Sheila told him.

"Is she nice?"

"Not very."

"Well, that wouldn't matter. You know," Christopher was pleased to admit, after a thoughtful pause, "it's not a bad idea. She's not an Aug herself, is she, by the way? Because if we once let them know that we were dogging them——"

"No, she's not an Aug; she's curious about Augs, though. We—we talked a bit."

"That, my dear Sheila, was very, very wrong of you, to talk to a strange little, dirty little girl—on the pier. You might have picked up anything!"

"No, I mightn't. I've told you: she wasn't an Aug, and I couldn't get Thomas to come away."

"I was looking at photos," Thomas remembered, and chuckled lewdly.

"If we let her into our society——"

"She'll be leaving here soon. The Aug season's nearly over. But she's certain to come back next year."

"Then we'll in-aug-urate her. I say, Sheila! Did you hear that? That was rather good! In-Aug-urate her." Christopher rolled about with ecstatic laughter at his own wit. "She can do a jolly useful lot of work for us, rootling about and spying and bringing us her notes. They'll be off their guard with her. That's settled, then. And now, what about Thomas? Shall we make him a member, or leave him out?"

Thomas was not a type to wince at heartlessness or ingratitude. He said: "Sheila's the only one of us who's going to have any supper to-night . . . I'll come half in, if you don't mind."

"You can't come half in. You're either a member of the Society or you're not."

"Yes, I can. I'll be half a member."

"You mean a half-member," Sheila corrected him. "It isn't customary, Thomas darling."

Thomas did not care if it were customary or not. He insisted on the half-member status, which would give, thus slow instinct warned him, a greater freedom, both mental and physical, than if he were completely a member where his age would relegate him to all the fagging.

"We'll leave that unsettled," Christopher frowned sternly at his small brother. Thomas was never exactly cheeky to the seniors of the tribe, but he was a little too determined always. "Now who's to go down and talk to this girl?"

"We'll none of us be allowed to move out of sight for the next week or two, after this scare, but she *might*, she just barely *might* be coming up here this evening at half-past seven."

"Whatever for?"

"To be thanked for taking care of Thomas."

("She didn't," interrupted Thomas.)

"I asked her to call on Grandma, though Grandma doesn't know yet."

"What rotten ideas you do get! Still, this one may be useful, if she does come. If she doesn't you'd better write."

"No, you'd better write."

"You know her. I don't."

"It's a pity Thomas takes such hours. *He* could write. He *likes* writing letters."

They both looked at Thomas again, as though only lepers really liked writing letters.

"He'll never stop, once he doesn't have to wait for lines to be ruled for him any longer——"

"Shut up, Christopher. Don't tease him."

"I don't mind," said Thomas. "I can almost do without lines now. Almost."

"If I'm to write this letter," suggested Sheila, with her most charming smile, "can I be President of the Society?"

"Why do you want to be? We needn't have a President. It's only an empty title."

His sister debated silently whether she could win the empty title without having to go into explanations that she cared for dignity and consequence, panoply and procession, that she believed she had a gift for royal affability, and hoped one day to marry the Viceroy of India. Meanwhile, pending this, one might as well be President of the Clifford's Bay Society for the Investigation of Augs, with only Christopher and a photographer's girl for members, and Thomas for a half-member.

"If it's an empty title, you won't want it."

Christopher yielded her the presidency. It meant little

to him. He was not set on worldly importance, as long as life was potential with colour and thrill and mystery.

Sapphy walked slower and slower up the sloping road towards the Cliff House. Thanked? She didn't want to be thanked. Not by any silly old lady in a cap and knitting. For thus she visualised Sheila's grandmother. No, it was Sheila herself who was the lure. If she saw her for only one moment in the hall, perhaps, it would be worth what could not but prove a tiresome and uncongenial interview. But a glorious surprise was in preparation for her.

"Sh! Is that you?" spoke Sheila's voice from the shadow of the thick hedge of rhododendron and barberry and holly. "Please, would you mind dreadfully not coming into the house at all, but staying out here with me, where we shan't be seen? Because I've got something to tell you. Would you mind?"

Sapphy, her heart thumping and her face scarlet, indicated that she would not mind. On the contrary.

Sheila's narrative powers were clearer than Christopher's, and in a few minutes Sapphy knew the whole story of the finding of Dr. Leigh's notes, with their amazing revelation of the separate existence of Augs and the still unfulfilled menace that yearly threatened Clifford's Bay. Sheila ended with an extremely courteous invitation for Sapphy to become an active member of the Secret Society for the Investigation of Augs.

Because it was Sheila Leigh who told her, more than because of any respect for the medical profession, Sapphy believed every word of this. Come to think of it, there had always been a good deal queer about that August rush lot, only they'd kept her too busy to get it

sorted out, come to think of it.

Sheila looked sympathetically at the thin reedy limbs and drawn peaked features of Sapphire Drupp. So this was what They did to you, if you had to serve Them.

"You must be glad it's only in August," she breathed. "Where do you suppose They go when They're not here?"

"The rest of the time, do you mean?"

"Sh . . . yes, the rest of the time." But there were hundreds, thousands of questions she wanted to ask the sophisticated Sapphy. Just imagine—to be actually here in the twilight, alone with a pier photographer's daughter, who saw Augs every day, crowds of Augs, who mingled with Augs, touched them! Her eyes dilating, she murmured: "Have you ever—I mean, do They ever—Do you always photograph Them wearing clothes? Are They real underneath? Because if you bang into Them, They feel just the same, only perhaps stronger—no, not stronger, thicker and tougher. And yet Christopher says——"

Sapphy replied on the same breathless note: "Talk about banging into Them. Sometimes it don't seem the season ain't never going to end, and They come trooping in, more and more of 'Em, and I'm tired out. Sometimes even after They've gone, I've been and fancied I'm banging into 'Em!" And she repeated: "Even after there's not one of Them here any more."

"That's not natural," from Sheila, shivering.

"Nothing about 'Em's natural." Sapphy shivered, too, while responsive little tremors, though more of stimulation than of panic, ran up and down Sheila's back. "Go on," she urged, "tell me some more." A new experience for Sheila Margaret Leigh to be in the company of a girl

of her own age, who was also her superior in worldly—no, in other-worldly knowledge.

"Well, talking of what we were just talking about, and what you was asking me," Sapphy frowned, thinking hard of what would bear on the enquiry, and at the same time impress Sheila with her indispensability as a member of the Society, "once it happened," she said slowly, dropping out the words, "that a couple who had just got engaged came to be photographed."

"How? With the crab?"

"No," contemptuously, "They never get took like that with just the heads when They're engaged. Why should They?"

Sheila said: "Sorry" humbly.

"Well, anyhow, next year They come back again, same two married, and with a baby, to be took again, all three of 'Em."

"You're sure They were the same?"

"Certain sure."

"That shows," Sheila assented softly, accepting the argument. "I'll tell Christopher."

Suddenly she broke into a ripple of laughter. "Listen, this is simply awfully funny! I've only just thought of it."

"Tell me! Oh, do tell me! Hurry up, or someone'll come out!"

So then Sheila, hurrying, told her about Cousin Nellie, who had just come to live at the Cliff House. "She's Grandmother's cousin, and she's always lived miles up North in a little country village and never saw anyone. She's just like a baby about Them, thinks They're such nice jolly people, and wants to go and join them and do everything they do. It's simply screamingly funny in anyone as old as Cousin Nellie, with grey hair. And Grand-

father and Grandmother keep so solemn and stiff when she chatters on."

"Won't you want to laugh, now that you know? I should split if I was you."

"No; I'm awfully good at that; keeping serious and not showing ever that I know what they mean."

"You get lots more fun that way. Look here, there's something else about Augs——"

Up in the hall of the Cliff House, Baxter conscientiously banged one of the gongs. The Cliff House was rich in gongs.

"Oh, blow! I shall have to go in."

Sapphy was startled at the inadequacy of Sheila's vocabulary for expressing annoyance.

"Well, but when—when shall I see you? You won't be coming down to the pier to-morrow, or will you? We're off early next week. No good stopping once this Saturday and Sunday's over. It'll be the last with any business. It's wonderful how quick they melt away, once they do begin."

"Melt away? *Melt?* Do you mean *really* melt? Do you know, I still feel as though I'd dreamt Uncle Alec's notes, and you, and everything!"

"I'm not half a dream," said Sapphy, pirouetting and sketching a vaporous pose, to the astonishment of the postman who passed just then. She added, gurgling: "More like a nightmare."

"Oh no, not a bit!" Sheila never forgot her manners. Poor Sapphy really *was* very like a nightmare, too, in some ways. Christopher would have said "Yes." "I'll be late, and they'll ask—I say, how soon are you coming back?"

"Not till next middle of July."

"Well, then, will you work with us then, as we said?"

Find out things, and make reports, and all that?"

Sapphy nodded. "Sure you'll still mean it next year?"

"Of *course* I will! I never change. Good-bye, I must simply fly!"

Sapphy's hot fingers clutched her arm. "See here, if I think of something that's—part of it, you know, after I'm gone, and I'm sure to, shall I write you letters? Is it safe?"

"Not awfully, I'm afraid."

It would have been safe enough, but Sheila could not help feeling that a letter from Sapphy Dripp might be rather—"Oh well, you know, Christopher, *horrid*," in describing the interview to her two brothers who had had no dinner.

Instantly Christopher had a vision: The letter was written on mauve notepaper with ripply lines on it—a sort of paper corduroy—with a grubby mark where she had pressed the flap down. The stamp was stuck on, not quite upside down, but nearly, and very crooked. There might have been a sentimental cause for this, or it might have been just slovenly. And the writing—

"Christopher!" indignantly, "I'd be ashamed if I were such a snob as you!"



CHAPTER VI

THE Cliff House stood in slightly less than an acre of garden in one of those typical shady roads nearly always to be found in seaside places, where all the houses are slightly different and none of them touch, and all of them have nice gardens; a steep road, with banked-up, irregular paths on either side, without any pavements; rather exciting paths, from Thomas's point of view, because Nurse preferred to walk along the road below, where there was hardly ever any traffic, except frequently a butcher's cart; Merton Road seemed to be flushed with meat-eaters. Thus the top of Nurse's head was about on a level with Thomas's knees, and he achieved physical superiority. Sheila and Christopher were allowed to run not too far ahead with the two elder Arundel children, Pamela and Gerald, grandchildren both of Dr. Bryant, and of the vicar, Mr. Arundel. The Doctor's daughter, Margaret, had married the vicar's son. Which was nice.

Running ahead, they reached the cliff at the end of Merton Road long before the two trudging nurses with the Arundel pram, and Thomas, solitary on the high path, looking through the fences and privet and barberry hedges at each house and garden, and saying to himself: "I'll have that one; I won't have that one. I won't have this one or this one or this one. I might have this one, but I will have this-one-whatever-happens."

This-one-whatever-happens was the one with his favourite tree, a Japanese maple. All the trees overhung the road, and the road meandered gradually into a wide

chalky track, with only a last house or two on either side; and then became the cliff path itself, with broad light spaces on the Downs side, and a drop to the sea if you went too near the edge of the cliff, and a close, bright weaving of wild flowers on either side of your feet: camomile and mustard and poppies and scabious and speedwell, pimpernel and wild vetch and sorrel grass; white and yellow and red and mauve and blue; and plenty of ships and plenty of gulls and plenty of wind, unless it was hot and there was no wind at all, and the grass on the distant downs shimmered, and the oats did not rustle or sway, but stood still under the sun. . . . A good walk for children after tea; not many people there. It was explained now, at last, Thomas reflected, this goblin fear of "people" in your nurse and your aunt and your grandparents, and particularly in your father. Yet in spite of what Sheila and Christopher had told him they had found in Uncle Alec's notebook, Thomas was not entirely convinced of the danger from Aug contact. Augs don't *do* anything to you; Augs didn't hurt you, however many there were. Sometimes they jostled up against you, but that didn't hurt. Augs were friendly.

He had forgotten, this year, the moment when he had shared the horror last year, when the group of people had jostled him as they came out of the wax-works, singing: "What's the matter with Crippen?"

Nevertheless, Thomas had not as yet quite assimilated the relief which the finding of the note-book had brought to his brother and sister. He could not quite understand why, ever since then, they had been so much happier and so much more tolerant of authority's restrictions, even though these restrictions had been tightened till there was no more elastic in them. Before

the Augs had become the Augs, when Father or Nurse had dinned and dinned admonition at the children, Sheila and Christopher had seemed hardly able to bear it. Once, indeed, Christopher had burst out crying, and yet he wasn't a cry-baby; and Sheila would say: "All *right* . . . oh, all *right* . . ." her voice running up high and pettish with a sharp break at the end, though it was usually what Grandma called such a pretty soft voice like-mine-at-her-age.

They were still taken on the beach in the mornings, until the third week in July. But now, the year after Thomas's uncharted expedition down the pier, it was: "Thomas! Thomas! Thomas!" all the time. "Thomas, you mustn't speak to those little boys . . . No dear, you mustn't lend them your pail; I expect they've nice pails of their own. . . . They're not very nice children, dear, that's why, and you never know what you may pick up. . . . Never mind what I mean by 'pick up.' Just do as Father—Granny—Nurse—Auntie Sybil says."

Then, when he tried to explain that he was simply digging a water-course that was to join up with theirs, and form a whole system that would presently drain the whole beach, and was going to do nobody any harm—"No, darling, I won't have it. It isn't as though you hadn't plenty of your own little friends to play with. Look, there's Michael digging a lovely hole."

But Michael was a fool, and had only a wooden spade because he always fell on his iron ones and cut his knees, and he didn't understand irrigation in its larger sense. A hole was just a hole, but irrigation was canals and water-ways wherever there was an inch of room. . . .

"No, darling, you mustn't go and sit with those children and hear the niggers. There's such a crowd. You can

join in the songs from over here."

"From over here," reflected Thomas scornfully. "*From—over—here!*" when you wanted to be sitting in the very front row. He argued once or twice: "*Their* mothers and dads don't mind a bit their knowing me, so why should *you* mind? That boy in the red jersey's big sister offered me a doughnut——"

Horror of the Leigh Nurse. "It might have had *infection*. Thomas, do you hear—please attend to what I'm saying because it's important—leave your seaweed till afterwards——" for Thomas was absorbedly and very carefully scraping the sand from a long shining ribbon of seaweed—"you must *never* accept food from strangers."

Sheila, standing near-by, remembered, with a swift look at Christopher, a marginal note from the black notebook:

"*Infection, Question of:* It has been observed that we can be infected with Augustans' diseases; the point not yet fully investigated is, can they be infected with ours?"

Sheila and Christopher were also perpetually warned and called hither, and shifted about, admonished and restricted, like Thomas. But Sheila and Christopher knew what it was all about. Thomas supposed that that was because they were whole members of the Society they had formed last September, and had read the notes in the black notebook which he had not been allowed to see. They said, to chasten him for his declaration of independence, that Uncle Alec's manuscript was only for whole members. But Thomas happened to know that they had not shown it to Sapphy, either; only told her about it. That seemed to him right and proper. He shared their unspoken sense that it was fit that these notes, though they seemed impersonal enough, were, in reality, somewhat of a private and family nature. "But I'm as much Family as

them," reflected Thomas crossly. For anything to do with his Uncle Alec was particularly of interest to him.

To-day Uncle Alec had arrived for the usual summer holiday he spent with his parents and family at the Cliff House. Thomas munched on this satisfactory item, as he marched rather apart from his kin, and very apart from the pram and the Arundels' nurse, along the cliff road.

The residents felt that this particular cliff was almost their private territory, even on the brink of August. Already when you looked across the bay which masked the pier and the beach and the parade, to the other cliff, the Chalk Cliff, jutting beyond, it was black with people, black with tiny, moving dots. . . . *Augs.* Thomas stood and stared across at this engaging prospect, till Nurse called out sharply: "Come along, Thomas, can't you? There's nothing to gape at that I can see." And seized him by the arm, pulling him along with her, while he still stared back over his shoulder, and thought how dull it was to be here, on the East Cliff where only the Arundels and other residents' children might be seen, playing at approved games. Down on the beach there was real fun going on, that you might not join in: a tug-of-war in the water, and you sat down splash, shouting and screaming, rolling over and over in the shallow waves; down on the beach competitions were organised "for the kiddies," and you might not join in; and there were donkey-races over the sands and you might not join in. He wished that at least they could go for a walk in the other direction after tea, a walk on the *Augs'* Cliff, on the parade, on the pier even. . . .

Presently Pamela Arundel sneezed three or four times, and said she hadn't got a cold, and the Arundel nurse said she had, and no coat with her, of course. The Arundels

all turned back, but the Leighs' Nurse asserted that it was no good saying they'd had their proper walk yet, for they hadn't. And Miss Sheila was to see to it that Christopher didn't go too near the edge, suddenly flinging himself down on his tummy to watch sea-birds; and Thomas would walk behind with her. Presently, however, Thomas broke away and ran on ahead, overtaking Sheila and Christopher. He had something on his mind which had to be settled at once.

"Now that They're coming back," he asked breathlessly, "where have They been in the meanwhile?"

"They haven't been at all," quickly from Christopher.

This was more sensational than Thomas had expected. "As if They died, and then un-died again?"

"Yes. No! As if—You're always so solid!" said Christopher in a gust of exasperation, not quite sure of the exact process of the translation of the Augs out of existence and into it again.

Sheila argued: "I believe They *do* go on existing, like swallows when they migrate in flocks and shoals, as though they hear something mysterious pulling them and have got to answer."

"You don't hear things pull, stupid. And if They just went away to another country and came back again, which is frightfully tame and not a bit what I *feel* about Them, then They wouldn't be different. They'd just be people of another nation who liked Clifford's Bay in August. And you know as well as I do that it's not like that, and Uncle Alec says it isn't. They're—different."

Sheila replied: "Uncle Alec says there'll always be two Schools of Thought, and there are. I'm one and you're another."

"And what am I?" Thomas thrust in.

"You're the youngest. And it's a great honour for you to be an honourable member at all, even half a member."

"Not honourable," Sheila corrected tolerantly, "honorary."

"Well, whichever it is."

"If They go away," Christopher began again, "then how is it that your photograph-girl said for a long time after They'd gone away that she bumped into Them without seeing Them, as if there were still crowds?"

Thomas listened intently. This was news to him.

"That's a haloossination," Sheila explained carefully.

"What's a haloossination?" asked Thomas.

"Run back and walk with Nurse."

Thomas remained where he was.

"Besides, They go away in trains!"

"Yes," retorted Christopher, abandoning his side of the argument in order to catch at this newly-shaken pattern in their kaleidoscope, "*Aug* trains!" Excitedly he swished at the grasses growing high on either side of the path.

"What's an *Aug* train?"

Christopher improvised madly: "It looks like other trains, to deceive us, but it isn't. Because it goes nowhere. It just disappears with its living freight."

Thomas kept on: "Do They think They're going somewhere, too? Or do They know it's an *Aug* train and is going to disappear? Because if They do, I think it's silly of Them to get into it."

"They've got to follow the secret law, if They want to or not. They hate going away, they say so all the time."

"Which law?"

"*Aug* Law."

"What would happen if one of us got into an *Aug* train?"

Christopher's eyes were round and shining. "We'd find out, then, but we wouldn't be able to come back. Real people, you know, are terribly careful never to travel in Aug trains. They say it's because they're so crowded. But *that* isn't why."

Sheila threw a protecting arm round Thomas, in case Christopher were frightening him. "They do come back. We've seen that They do. We've noticed the same faces over and over again every summer."

"Yes, that's Augs. But *we* wouldn't come back. Hugh didn't, did he?"

"You're trying to muddle me!" Sheila frowned, for she had a well-tidied mind, and did not like to be muddled. Besides, Christopher took any and every side of an argument as soon as it became shiny and attractive.

"I mean that Hugh or any of us, once we'd got out of the safety and into the wrong circle—*their* circle—wouldn't know the laws of beginning again when the time came round. One day I'm going to——"

"Going to what?"

"Nothing."

Sheila was too old, at fourteen, to believe in the story-books where imaginative children passed through the doors of cuckoo-clocks, or the archway in a tapestry, and found themselves on the farther side of a blue door. . . . But Augs and Aug trains were a different matter, since her Uncle Alec's methodical corroboration of the family's most exaggerated warnings. So that it was partly to correct her own hidden fears that she ranged herself with the School which believed that there was an Aug kingdom somewhere; not so nice as Clifford's Bay; otherwise, why should They keep on being so glad to arrive and so sorry to leave? And because she conscientiously believed this

to be the better doctrine for Thomas, she now drew him a little away from Christopher, and in a rather kind, elder-sisterly manner tried to turn her theory into easy, pretty monosyllables for his benefit, and to chase away the bogeys.

But Thomas was not satisfied. Christopher had been too loosely sensational, and Sheila too kindergarten, in their answers to his questions. He decided that it would be a good thing to hear some sense on the subject. So at the earliest opportunity he got hold of Dr. Leigh when he was alone in the spare room changing for dinner.

"Uncle Alec, when They——"

"Who?"

"I don't know. But they say—I don't mean They—but Chris and Sheila say that you know, and that it was you who first told them about Them."

"Them?"

"Augs."

"Augs," repeated Alexander, not as a question, but as a statement. He was still extremely mystified, but he knew that Thomas would get through in time.

Thomas started again: "When They go away, do They take Themselves as They are, to a different place, and put Themselves down there, until They come back next year? Or do they disappear in bits like the Cheshire cat? Or—or—or melt like a candle when you blow it out and there's nothing where there was something before? Only, of course, that's not the melty part of the candle, that's the flame. And do They sort of un-melt again when They feel the summer coming on? Like swallows, Sheila said, or what's that fish that swims away, millions of them, and then comes back?"

Thomas did not deliver his miscellany in a muddled

way, but just as one putting his uncle in possession of the facts, leaving his uncle to arrange them in orderly sequence, as being an occupation more adapted to the capacity of forty-two than nine. Thomas was never one of those children who always wanted to be older than he was; to prove that he could sit up late; ride a bicycle; go out after dark alone; he was contented to accept the benefits and attainments that each year brought him, without scrambling impatiently towards next year's. But Sheila had tried to patronise him, and Christopher would not show him the notebook, and when he quested for knowledge they blocked his way by futile arguments of their own; and he did not consider that a half membership bound him to the utmost capacity of extreme loyalty and mind-you-don't-tell. So, butting through loyalty like a goat through a chiffon curtain, he announced: "They've made a secret society, and it's terribly secret, but I don't mind that, because I'm only an honourable half-member. It was me who first found the photo-girl at the end of the pier, and she's an honourable member. They vestigate."

"Thomas," said his uncle, "what, briefly, do you want to know?"

And Thomas replied briefly: "Where the Augs go, when they go." And he added, after rumination: "Christopher found a notebook, one of those tuppenny ones. Black," explained Thomas meticulously, "and rather shiny, in your room, when he moved in there when he was twelve last September."

And now Alexander knew what it was all about.

CHAPTER VII

NURSE was at the door, explaining breathlessly that she couldn't think where Thomas had got to, and did he think there was no such thing as bed-time? Instead of bothering his uncle, he was to come along now quick, and anything he wanted to ask his uncle could wait quite well till to-morrow, when likely as not he'd have forgotten all about it.

"Good night, Thomas," said his Uncle Alec, an unspoken but none the less courteous apology in his tone for the necessity of such brusque creatures being employed by the grown-up world of which he himself unavoidably formed part. "That's a very interesting question you've raised, and I'll see you about it in the morning."

When he was alone, Alexander thoughtfully went over to the glass to tie his black tie.

The children were mysteriously happier this year. He had noticed it directly he had arrived, and wondered why, because certainly the nervous tyranny imposed on them had not been relaxed; rather the contrary. But obedience did not any more have to be dragged out of them; they collaborated more readily with authority. And, what was most important from this particular uncle's point of view, they looked better, less nervy, a softer and bloomier line of cheek and upturned eyelash, when you looked at them suddenly sideways.

Could that, fantastically, be the result of Christopher's finding a certain tuppenny black notebook in what had been the boy Alexander's old bedroom?

His old bedroom. Dr. Leigh looked round him with distaste. His mother had been perfectly right; as he only came home for any length of time once a year, the spare room would do quite well, but he could not help feeling it rather a nauseating room, for all that: blue wallpaper, one satin stripe and one dull, not much fun in that; and a bedroom suite all matching, even to the semi-armchair. The wash-stand bore on its marble slab the burden of wash-basin, pitcher, soap-dish, sponge-bowl and tooth-brush-vase, in white china, printed with a line of blue horizon, ships and a gull. That beastly gull was everywhere; there was even room for it on the soap-dish. Two pictures on the wall represented respectively "The Haunt of Beauty," showing an 1860-ish lady at the top of a flight of marble steps, holding out her hand to a couple of not over-enthusiastic swans, and "The Death of Gordon," with the General standing in white drill, bare-headed, a light rattan in his hand, also at the top of a flight of steps, looking down at the hordes of advancing natives swarming up towards him. (This was by no means the only picture in the house representing "The Death of Gordon." A natural consequence of the Colonel's Sudan service was a fervent admiration for the hero of Khartoum, and a slightly stubborn insistence that every one of his sons and grandsons should have "Gordon" as one of his names.)

"I hate this," muttered Dr. Leigh, wondering if he could not stride back to his old bedroom and turn out Christopher, send him spinning into the passage, and make himself comfortable again? Damn it, what was the use of being sentimental about children? Even if Christopher had got fond of the room by now, he'd have worse things to put up with, later on, than an eccentric, inconsistent, inconsiderate and irascible old relative.

And, to carry description into action, Alexander flung on his dinner-jacket, banged the door on striped blue splendour, and, he did not quite know why, went upstairs to the nursery.

From sounds next door, Thomas was being bathed, and presently Nurse came in to gather up a pair of clean flannel pyjamas which were airing on the fire-guard. She looked surprised to find Alexander there. He had only arrived that morning, and they had not seen each other for some time. But although he was her former nursling, she did not croon over him, nor tell him he looked bonny, nor even, which would have been nearer the truth, that he was looking a bit gaunt from over-work.

"Hallo, Nurse."

"Were you wanting any of the children, Mr. Alec? Miss Sheila and Christopher are out in the garden, but Thomas is having his bath."

Alexander signified that Thomas had better go on having it undisturbed. He knew there were Peter Pannish things that he and Nurse and Thomas might do between them at bath-time, in the night nursery: romps and deep barking and refusing to take medicine; but he did not feel that either he or Nurse was very much in the Mr. Darling or Nana tradition. So Nurse went back to her duty, and he sat down in the rocking-chair.

Nurse had been "the new nurse" at the time of Hugh's drowning, though she had already been with them nearly three years. But up till then she had remained young and crude, a bit careless, but anxious to give satisfaction. She had been in charge when Hugh had strolled away to the end of the pier and joined the rollicking party trying to put off in a boat, with rather big waves slapping them back against the steps every time, while they had

flourished oars, and screamed with laughter, and called out pseudo-nautical terms, such as: "Ahoy, there! Abaft the mizzen! What ho, the bo'sun!"

Nurse never forgot that she was partly responsible. Not that the Leighs rubbed it into her. They were quite decent about that. In fact, it was themselves they blamed for not having forbidden the pier in August. Nurse could ever afterwards be trusted, from Colonel and Mrs. Leigh's point of view, to keep a sharp eye on the next generation placed in her charge.

She returned now from the bathroom and night nursery, having presumably settled Thomas. With only a sharp "Still here?" look towards the eminent physician rocking himself absently in front of the fire-guard, she spread her ironing-board, took up the iron which had been heating on the methylated-spirit stand, and became conscientiously absorbed in her duties.

"Nurse! Is it my fancy, or are the children looking a good deal more healthy this summer than when I last saw them?"

It was a funny business, thought Nurse, not very coherently, when one of your "children" became in the course of years a great doctor; because the Doctor, great or even ordinary, was a being to be addressed in very special tones of respect, and it didn't seem natural, somehow, to know anything about his very early teens. She agreed with Dr. Leigh, however, that Mr. Gordon's children were looking very well indeed; but they were healthy enough to begin with, just as he and Mr. Gordon and Mr. Bernard had been healthy. It was a pity that Mr. Bernard had left his health behind him in India, though he never complained, and seemed quite happy at the

kennels, breeding his spaniels; nice enough dogs (though she didn't care for dogs, as a rule), who never lost their temper or snapped at the children.

"But I agree with you, Mr. Alec, that they've all three improved wonderfully since October, when Dr. Bryant started giving them that Bone Extract."

Dr. Leigh nodded profoundly. His lack of faith in the Bone Extract proved to him that his notebook had done the trick.

So this was what came of a piece of youthful satire, perpetrated some twenty-three years ago.

Not that it had been written altogether for the sake of showing off his young cleverness, either to himself or to others. He had badly desired some vent for nervous exasperation. Writing this thing had helped to clear it up, set it a little way at a distance, so that he could take a good look at it, think about it analytically, dissect it in the cold style of seventeen about to become a medical student, take an unadmitted pride in the dissection. Dr. Leigh felt now no sentimental affection and hardly any tolerance for the Alec Leigh whose biting criticism of his family had led him to formulate, after what he had hoped was the best style of Butler and Swift, the NOTES FOR A THESIS. Nevertheless, he understood, even now, why he had done it then. Perhaps, now that pride was out of it, he understood it even better. It had worried him deeply, to see his family suddenly lose their entire sense of proportion and become victims of an obsession. He had not been unfeeling over the accident that had led to Hugh's death. His brother was a cheerful little fellow, handsome, rebellious, over-excitable, not unlike young Christopher. He simply *would* rush off and join up with

any strangers who attracted him and though in those days there had not been many August visitors to Clifford's Bay, the Leighs strongly resented any invaders at all on their territory, already afraid that in time the place might grow "common."

Well, and it had grown common with a vengeance once a year. The mob had their unconscious revenge on the family for having squealed too soon.

Yes, he had been quite normally miserable over the death of Hugh; wished, indeed, that it could have been Bernie instead, Bernie, his youngest brother, who had been tiresome then, and was tiresome now.

"Nurse, did I bully Bernie when you first came to us?"

"Yes, Mr. Alec, that you did!" was the prompt answer.

Dr. Leigh was somewhat surprised. He had expected reassurance, more on the lines of: "You were always a very kind, elder brother to the little boys, Mr. Alec."

Nurse was so uncompromising. For two pins, he was sure of it, she would have gone on to say: "And you do now."

Certainly Hugh's death had not been the shock to him that it was to Gordon. Gordon had been just his twin's shadow. He was his twin's shadow now, in the sense that his thoughts and memories still moped round the scene and cause of the accident, and dictated that his life was to be one of perpetual panic in case it should happen again to one of his own children. There had been years between, of course, when Gordon had almost recovered from his shock, allowed the panic to remain quiescent, and thought of his work and his career; but directly he had children of his own, the panic started up and was rag-

ing worse than before. He was practically a "case" by now.

No fun for Sheila, Christopher and Thomas to live in a haunted house! Not only Gordon, their father, not only their grandparents, and, down a side-line of monomania, their Aunt Sybil, but Nurse, too—and perhaps worst of all, because the children naturally saw more of their nurse than of the other elders.

He had been worried about them for a long time, professionally and affectionately, for he was, in his impassive fashion, fond of them, though not equally fond of all three, and had wished he could change the conditions surrounding them. He had thought about it quite a lot.

That notebook . . . He knew it was there, vaguely. Vaguely, even, when he remembered it, he was grateful for its aid at the time. Perhaps he, too, might have become a "case" if he had not found just that much outlet. A year later he had gone up to London to the hospital, and after that there was no danger for him any more. He was no writer, or he would have done more about it. He was a scientific man in embryo. Very much in embryo.

Gulliver's Travels, Erewhon, a lot of early Wells, too; *In the Days of the Comet*. . . He smiled at the memory of how he had eliminated all emotion from his style, cultivating a detached manner and four Wellsian dots whenever austerity had demanded that he should draw attention to the fact that he was not making a point, instead of making it. Such pride was sinful. And there had been another book, too, which he had happened to read, and which had impressed him, though he was less sure that he was right to be impressed by that, because although a satire, it was fantasy, and the colours in it were regrettably vivid: *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

And meanwhile, summer after summer since Hugh's

drowning, the family were getting worse instead of better. They could not stop talking about Summer Visitors. The subject fascinated them; or rather, their own hatred fascinated them. It was "on the nerve." The Colonel had fought in the Sudan War, but his feeling for the dervishes had been sunny affection compared with his feeling for what his eldest son rather pompously designated "The Augustans." All day long, evidence of their loathsomeness was brought into the house by one or another member of the family; and because Mrs. Leigh was the First Lady of the Bay, she and her husband led all the other residents into the same exaggeration of remonstrance and protest, till Alec could hardly bear to be cooped up during his school holidays with so much futility and waste and distortion of all values.

"One would think," he reflected, trying to cheat despair by isolating his mental attitude more and more from the rest, "that these people were not human beings at all, but a grotesque barbarian race inflicted for some mysterious chastening process on a resident population that would rather die than be chastened."

And having once got the idea, it amused him to observe silently, sardonically ("Oh God, I must have been awful at that age! Intelligent, perfectly right and pretty bloody awful!") how his mother and father did indeed speak of the Augustans exactly as though they were a different race, a fourth-dimensional race with devilish potentialities.

Was it only the accident? Supposing, for instance, that Hugh had fallen off a tram, would Mrs. Leigh for ever afterwards have carried on a distorted loathing, out of all proportion, of tram-lines, conductors, tickets, bells? No, it was more than Hugh's death, though that formed a nucleus. It was the eternal resentment which the first

settlers feel for nomadic invaders from a different tribe. Read "residents" for "Settlers," and "class" for "tribe," and there you are. Primitive instinct was the same, and what must have maddened the Leighs was the sublime unconsciousness of These People that they were in any way unwelcome or a nuisance. They just arrived, swarmed, upset everything, made a noise, and departed again in perfect good humour, promising to come back. The very rhythmic regularity of the whole process must have had something to do with its effect on the Leigh nerves. If only for one year they had omitted to come!

And the Leighs were unconscious, too, that they were in any way unbalanced over the whole business. They thought themselves dignified owners of a just grievance.

No, it was not quite that attitude, either. The Summer Visitors were treated by his family as though they were lepers, or Jews, or negroes, or degenerates, or dervishes, or Germans during the war, but also with some strange property added to their undesirability. Supposing a race of Martians, for instance—well, as far distant as that, but nothing like as starry—a sub-species of Martians had possessed Clifford's Bay. . . .

"Hath not an Aug hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Resident is?"

"*No!*" Mrs. Leigh would have said of the Augustans. "No. Decidedly not." And again, with intense conviction: "*Those People?*"

And then, with a gesture of helpless disgust: "Why *here*—why must They always come *here?*" As though nobody ever took their August holiday anywhere else

except at Clifford's Bay, shattering the tranquillity of the Leighs.

Nurse had finished her ironing and was going down to her supper. At the door she paused, doubtful whether she should leave Dr. Leigh sitting there alone. Not that he could come to much mischief, but still. . . . He was rocking himself to and fro, with one foot kicking methodically against the fender, rather in the same way as Christopher. The sound was annoying, and she would have liked to have said briskly: "Don't do that, Mr. Alec!" But his face was forbidding as a Red Indian's whose thoughts were on old tribal feuds. So she merely asked: "Shall I turn on the light for you, sir?"

He did not reply. Perhaps he had not heard. There was no sense in wasting light; she had finished her ironing in the falling dusk so as not to waste good light. So she went downstairs and left him.

. . . And now Gordon's children had found the notes and had taken them literally, and would have to be told that the thing was a satire. And Thomas, probably, would say: "Does that mean a lie?" and it would all be extremely difficult to explain without saying crudely that their own father was off his chump on that one particular subject.

Sheila and Christopher came tearing along the corridor, messy from feeding their guinea-pigs and cleaning out the cages. That young beast Thomas ought to have been there, too, to do his share, but he had disappeared into the house after their walk. Now, secure in the knowledge that Nurse would be downstairs at her supper, they were going

to ask him what he jolly well meant by it.

It was a little surprising to find a gentleman in a dinner-jacket rocking himself in the semi-darkness.

"Hallo, Uncle Alec! Were you waiting for us?"

And Sheila added: "We'd have washed first, if we'd known. I'm so sorry."

"So you've been reading what I wrote in a black notebook?"

That released what had been pent-up for nearly a year. It happened that on his rare brief visits to the Cliff House since his departure last September, they had never seen him alone. Now came musketry of question, comment, exultation. They told him that, of course, he had been too busy since he was seventeen, but that they were going to carry on with the work. They told him that they had named the Augustans the Augs for short; and he would find it a very convenient name when he had used it two or three times. They asked a million questions about the Augs, and their mysterious difference from the human race; and answered themselves—at least, Christopher did—by surmise, which seemed to become fact even while it took shape in his mind and pattered off his tongue. They told him about the Secret Society, and promised him an introduction to Sapphy, who would be re-installed on the pier probably in two or three days, if not already.

And then Christopher said: "You'll join the Society, won't you?"

And Sheila added: "At least, in a way you're a member already, and the first member, because you began the investigations, and we'd never have known without you."

And Christopher said: "You'll be frightfully useful, especially as you always come down at this time of year, because you can snoop round in places where we're not

allowed during August, and bring us the results of your sleuthing."

And Sheila said: "Because, you see, since we know that they've got something to fuss about, we're much more amem—amen—I don't quite know the word I want—I mean, there's much more sense in the whole thing, and now we respect the Fuss, don't we, Christopher?"

"Yes, we do. But they ought to have told us, not left us to find out by accident, though Sheila says that they don't know nearly as much as you and us, and that the Fuss is instinct, guarding us from they're not quite sure what would happen to us if they didn't."

"It's a perfectly right instinct," from Sheila. "When they say 'You never know'—well, you never do know, do you, with Augs? And for the sake of *our* children, mine especially, because I'm likely to have some long before Christopher, I think the time really has come for the whole matter to be more fully sifted and—found out about. Don't you, Uncle Alec? It was so—so *thrilling* when we found your notes."

Back to the notes again. And this was Dr. Leigh's opportunity to enlighten them. As thus:

"Listen, Christopher. Listen, Sheila—and you'd better tell Thomas, too, to-morrow: *there are no such things as Augs*. Augs are just nice ordinary people who come to Clifford's Bay for a holiday. As for those notes, I wrote them as a satire, partly to amuse myself, and partly because I considered my family were losing their sanity on that one subject. It helped me to get a clear detached view of their psychological condition, by writing up, in exaggerated form, what was going on in their mentalities. It's growing worse every year since you children have come to live with them. There's absolutely no sane reason

whatever for the Fuss, as you call it. I should think it would end by making all three of you very ill indeed. I would mention that last item to your father, only, as a doctor, I should diagnose his mental condition on the subject of the perfectly harmless summer invasion as quite beyond all hope."

Dr. Leigh might have said all this.

What he actually did was to accept as a matter of course his membership of the Society; to promise to add what he could in the way of research into the up-to-date conditions and developments of the Aug race, and to contribute a paper to the Society's organ, which no doubt they would regularly produce now that the Aug season was beginning.

The idea of the organ was accepted with delirious enthusiasm, though Sheila and Christopher agreed that it had better be circulated privately in the Society, and not given to the world until later on, when they would have a complete dossier of the race, their origin, their functioning, their occupations and habitat during the long intervals between materialisations in Clifford's Bay; "If they have memories, if they have babies, and if they know they are as different from us as we know they are, or if they think they are the same—You'd better make a note of that, Uncle Alec, it's important, and you might forget. And we ought to know what's most likely to inflame their passions—oh, and trains! what becomes of Aug trains afterwards, and when they begin—there's masses to investigate still. Really, you know, Uncle Alec, your notes are extremely preliminary, if you'll excuse my saying so."

Ten minutes later, when the gong broke up this first breathless conclave, and Sheila and Christopher had dashed away to wash their flushed faces and hot, grubby

hands, Dr. Leigh paused on the landing, and wondered whether he had done irrevocably the wrong thing. He had formed his sudden decision to let the fantasy continue and build itself up, on their implicit revelation that they were not in the least afraid of this sinister race created out of imagination, years of the Fuss, and a black notebook. What *had* terrified them was a lack of fundamental sense—for it reduced itself to that—in their own home, among their own people. But the menace of an Aug, mysterious and undependable, justified any amount of the Fuss.

The Brontë children, after all, had found infinite ease from their repressions, in the Gondels.

He could hear happy chattering in the bathroom:

“. . . and we'll call it 'The Augan.' A-U-G-A-N."

"Christopher, that's really *good*!"

"Yes, isn't it? I do think it's good. 'The Aug Augan.'"

"No. I like just 'The Augan' best. It *is* good."

And shouts of laughter.

Alexander smiled and went on downstairs. On the first landing he met Cousin Nellie, wearing an evening blouse of grey lace, with a rustling black taffeta skirt, and a little mauve velvet ribbon round her neck, to give a touch of colour.

"I can guess what you've been doing," she said, also smiling gaily, for the sight of tall men coming downstairs in evening dress always exhilarated her, even after nearly a year in the Leigh household; her own brother Humphrey had never changed for dinner. "You've been having a game of romps with the children, as a treat, on your first night. Now, haven't you? I can hear them still laughing. *Aren't* they looking well?"

CHAPTER VIII

BERNARD LEIGH's principal illusion was that he was inarticulate, like soldiers and Englishmen and explorers. He had done a bit of exploring in his time, and thought that he could not be got to talk about it. In his ear rang the sound of other residents at Clifford's Bay explaining to their visitors that "Captain Leigh simply can't be got to talk about his experiences as an explorer. We've tried, but——"

Alec had once remarked coolly, after Bernie had been holding forth in his most modest style for some twenty minutes: "Now tell us about that other time you lost your way in India."

Mrs. Leigh was the only person who perpetually saw her son Bernard as he would wish to be seen, and as he continually strove to be seen. Since Captain Leigh had been invalided out of the army, he had lived at home and rested a good deal. The keen air of Clifford's Bay was good for him. A man grows soft if he does nothing, so he not very energetically bred spaniels, in partnership with another man who had kennels near-by. Bernard had two spaniels of his own at the Cliff House, both bitches, Jess and Lassie. And both were devoted to him. They were also devoted to everyone else in the house, in the disconcerting way of spaniels, but Bernie preferred to overlook this, and always talked to the dogs in the idiom of a lonely man who had only got dogs to talk to. Which, considering that there was a household full of people, and genial people, was rather overdoing it. But Bernie over-

did most things: he was over-confident and over-deprecating at the same time, and ran himself down till Alexander wanted to go away and be sick. "I know I'm not much of a chap to look at," and then followed some rather dreadful jesting about his own looks. "Never trust a chap whose eyes are too close together. Look at me! I look more like a rat than usual to-day; it's my hay-fever," and so forth. He had a triangular face, slightly more foxy than rattish, and a rather fair gingery moustache. On cold days his thin cheeks looked even more hollow, and a blue tinge settled round his nose. Because he could never forget that he was not, strictly speaking, handsome, he elected to see himself as one of those wistful, ugly heroes of whimsical fiction, or in the manner of the clown who laughs while his heart breaks: Pagliacci and Cyrano.

His piano-playing was not at all bad, and much better than might have been expected. He never played anything through, however, but only snatches, now *allegro*, now *penseroso*. When he was actually playing, he forgot to be a poseur; but directly he stopped to talk about it, he was wont to say, laughing at himself, how awful his thumping was, and how decent the family was in putting up with it. "Though I expect they cry 'Thank God for small mercies' the moment I'm out of the room. In a way, though, when you're a bit of a crock like me, it's a great solace to be able to . . . even though it's only what I hear in my head that's worth while, not what my fingers bang out . . . I expect I make a most awful row . . . but I don't hear what I actually play."

It was all, from Alexander's point of view, damnably embarrassing. But then Alexander was overdone, too, in a different direction; probably a reaction from Bernie. There were no events in everyday life to warrant the

terrific degree of self-control which Alexander habitually employed; nor to justify his papyrus detachment.

It created a pleasant sensation when, early in August, Bernie suddenly announced his engagement. He had proposed to Gervase Goldacre, lady entertainer at the Esplanade Hotel; the big hotel on the parade facing the sea; the biggest hotel in Clifford's Bay; the hotel with balconies.

Everybody was delighted. The Leighs were not snobs; though it was not socially a very good match, they saw that Bernie was elated at his luck, and Gervase affectionate and attractive; it would be good for Bernie to have a nice bright, amusing wife; and one marriage in the family makes many. So that now, perhaps, Sybil. . . . It had always distressed Mrs. Leigh that her daughter Sybil did not have the same sort of good time as she herself had had when she was a girl; and since Mr. Aubrey had been frightened away by the dreadful summer crowds, Sybil had only half as many chances of marrying well as all the other girls in the place; because Bernard Leigh and Amyas Brooke were the two best bachelors in Clifford's Bay Society. In fact, there was hardly anybody else now. Hundreds of dreadful flashy men about, of course, this month and next; but only Nathaniel Cooper, who was, after all, a widower, and Amyas Brooke, of any good to Sybil. And they had both known her so long.

Sybil was a nice girl, whose age always seemed round about thirty-three, even when she was ten years younger, and even when she would be ten years older. She was quite intelligent and perfectly good-natured, though not weak. She was popular at Clifford's Bay; not quite so popular as her father, but certainly preferred to her

mother. There were several reasons for this. Mrs. Leigh did not even pretend to be absorbed in the right subjects. Especially servants and gardening. It was the custom in Clifford's Bay to treat one's servants with consideration, showing an interest in them as human beings. But Mrs. Leigh, though submissive to her husband, was autocratic with the servants, treating them as though she had once lived in India, which she had not. They had been stationed in Egypt, which, she said, was the same thing.

Violet Leigh had little pleasure in living at Clifford's Bay when the Colonel retired from the army. She was fond of big towns, and all her novels from the lending library, to please her, had to be about the gay capitals: London, Paris, New York, Vienna; or Simla and Cairo in the Empire's better days. A murmuring complaint that there was "nothing to do down here" ran through her life like the sound of a brook in a valley. Whenever the three Miss Lampeters were enthusiastic over the garden, Mrs. Leigh always remembered to admit that Sybil did it all; but the Miss Lampeters continued to congratulate Mrs. Leigh, because it seemed so incredible that she should not be fond of gardening, when nearly all the other resident ladies were perpetually to be found being efficient over planting, potting, and thinning-out. Mrs. Leigh knew that she ought to care about the garden, but she was terrified of all insects; there were no insects in the gay capitals; no wasps nor spiders nor daddy-long-legs. She was frightened even of ants. It was just as well that there were always males in the house; whenever, during the summer months, Violet Leigh's vague but elegant voice could be heard, not so vague and not so elegant, calling with that note of desperation: "James!" or "Bernie!" her husband and son knew that they had to

leave whatever they were doing and rush to her aid, because the matter of slaying would be urgent, whether the enemy flew or crawled. She never called for Sybil unless no one else was at home, though Sybil was better with spiders than Bernie, who did not care for them very much himself.

And here was Bernie engaged. And even Alec, so difficult to please—well, naturally; look at all the people he must meet in London!—even Alec liked Gervase very much indeed. In fact, his mother wondered romantically for a day or two whether he were in love with her himself? She believed she saw him wince once or twice, and clench his hands, while Bernie raved on about his happiness:

“I’m the luckiest bargee alive! My God, can you imagine what that glorious girl sees in a crock like me? Nothing to offer her—except, of course, a famous brother,” with a whimsical look at Dr. Leigh. “She knows, of course, bless her, that I’d give my life for her any time she wanted. But—that’s the worst of England—so damned few snakes about, for instance, to give a poor devil a chance to suck out the poison. Or . . . You know, I’ll let half a dozen of our friends say that we’re Beauty and the Beast, but after that, I believe the poor Beast is going to strike. He’s too well aware of it himself, you see. I mean, one can just put up with one’s disabilities and get along somehow, and laugh a bit, while one’s alone; but when——” His voice broke, and to cover it up, he bent and seized Lass by her long silky ears and tenderly pulled her towards him so that her paws rested on his knees and he could look straight into her adoring eyes. “Oh, Lassie, my lass, have you seen her, that girl of mine? Have you realised, O Lassie, that we’re actually going to

have this amazing creature for our very own, to live in the same house with us? We don't deserve it, do we, Lassie-my-lass? To have her racing across the lawn with us, calling to us. . . . 'Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea' . . . For—oh, Lassie, Lassie, she's accepted us, and I want to shout it aloud so that all the——"

Alexander interrupted with that caustic inflexion which Bernie most dreaded and resented: "Is it absolutely necessary, Bernie, for you to confide in the dogs? Won't *we* do instead?"

Bernard flushed a little, but he looked straight at Alexander and said with simple manliness: "Ah, let me make a fool of myself just for a day or two, Alec. I've not had many good things in my life lately, have I, now? You can't wonder, even you, that I'm a bit off my rocker with the glory of Gervase."

His mother followed Alexander out of the room, and said to him: "Alec darling, don't you think, on the whole, you're a little hard on Bernie? I mean, it's natural, in a way, that he—Bernard isn't so reserved as you. And he does bear it so bravely, about his lung, and having to be invalided out. The army was simply his *passion*, but you never hear him complain. He even jokes about it."

"*Doesn't* he just?" said Alec grimly.

And he added: "Bernie has the Sydney Carton complex," which Mrs. Leigh did not at first understand, though she had read *A Tale of Two Cities*. Then suddenly she remembered that it was about two men who were in love with the same girl, a girl named Lucy. . . . She said tactfully: "I expect it's difficult for you to realise what it's like to be so terribly in love. You're such a woman-hater," playfully.

He laughed and said: "Mother dear, you mustn't take it for granted that because I don't tell the spaniels about my love-affairs, I've never had any."

A shadow of reproof returned to her voice. "Your brother's life isn't so full as yours, Alec. You sometimes forget that. A lonely man often gets into the habit of talking to animals. Look at St. Francis."

"St. Francis wasn't in the least lonely. Bernie would adore the comparison, though."

Mrs. Leigh sighed; wished that Alec would be more tolerant. It was a very thankless task mediating between two brothers who never hit it off. She wondered all over again whether perhaps Alec, who had everything, was envying Bernie, who had nothing, his good fortune with Gervase? And tried to remember all the instances she had heard, of brothers killing each other because they were in love with the same girl. Or did it only happen in Corsica?

It was first a natural tendency and then a habit with Dr. Leigh, to reduce any matter that was bothering him, to paper and tabulation, as though he were working out some new scientific formula. He had tabulated when he was a boy of seventeen; and now again did he try, more or less mechanically, to reduce the proposition of Bernard's engagement to coherence; mainly because he himself was, and ever would be, extremely puzzled about it.

Easy, of course, to see why Bernie should have been attracted by Gervase; but Alexander hoped he was not being too unbrotherly in his surmise that no girl in her senses could be actually attracted by Bernie, using "attracted" in the sense of "in love with." Therefore she

must have had other reasons for accepting him. Dr. Leigh pondered the matter deeply, and then drew out his list of premises:

“(a) Mercenary motive. The girl apparently has no money whatever of her own; has to work hard for a living. Deeply pleasure-loving type, though not in the least shallow. Bernard certainly not rich, but has the small income left him by Uncle Roderick. Father probably would have helped a bit more. Whole atmosphere of a Leigh connection comfortable and unstrained. Girl obviously tired out from continual tension of looking after herself and providing for herself.

“(b) Therefore marriage with Bernard a relaxation and a refuge, not only material, but mental, moral and spiritual. Bernard not clever, not exacting, willing to serve; in fact, one of nature’s fags. Doubtless Bernie spoke plausibly and eloquently enough to carry conviction, of all he would do for her. Bed of roses, etc. Fingers to the bone, etc. Cloak of Sir Walter Raleigh, etc. You’ll always have me to . . . etc., when you’re ill. ‘O wert thou in the cauld blast,’ etc.

“(c) Maternal instinct. Bernie delicate and pathetic, silently (*sic*) fretting at having had to resign from Army. Disadvantages of having eminent elder brother, especially an eminent elder brother inclined to be harsh and unsympathetic. Appeal to girl’s indignation and sense of fairness. Bernie not his father’s favourite, nor his sister’s. Conceals unhappiness gallantly. Laughs at fate. Natural desire in girl to champion him and make it up to him.”

(d) on Dr. Leigh’s list was so extremely laconic as to make (a), (b) and (c) almost verbose in comparison: “Slipped into it by accident, and didn’t know how to get out again.”

"(e) She believed that it was the 'better side of herself' which wanted to marry Bernie; and encouraged that side, afraid of what the other 'side of herself' might land her into. She has a curious and exaggerated affection, which transpired in an impulsive conversation with me, for Merton Road; and clung to the idea of a house in the same road as Bernie's family.

"(f) She may have opened a Bible and put her finger in it and found it on the words about the marriage at Cana; or obeyed some other silly, superstitious indication."

He then branched off into a description of quite astonishing length, of the appearance, characteristics and psychology of Gervase Goldacre, the young lady entertainer at the Esplanade Hotel. It need not be assumed, from the favourable trend of the description, that Dr. Leigh had lost his heart to her. In point of fact, he admired her amiability and accomplishments, and was not blind to her merits of appearance, though he admitted some defects of temper. But he was not in love with her. Later on in the year they were to become, for a short while, excellent friends; and later still they parted, not exactly on a quarrel, for though Gervase might quarrel, Alexander would not; but he criticised her behaviour too unsparingly. She was furious, and he refused to recant. It is unlikely that after that, they ever met again.

"It all depends whether you see her in profile or front face. Her profile hardly matters. It is beautiful and uncharacteristic. One has seen many others like it, lifted in sadness towards the moon. But suddenly she turns, and you see, surprisingly, the face of a school-girl caught out by her head-mistress who is saying: 'You have an infinite capacity for nobility and self-control, if you would only——' and you know that the bumpy, laughing, flexible

features would easily rush to a grimace. It is a face in which you notice the clear spaces—*clear*, let it be understood, not vacant; clear like spaces of sky. Until it becomes tragic, it seems hardly to be a face of its own, but just, responsively, the face of whatever comes along. It is only in her unhappy moments that you realise her broad brow, the eyebrows in an exaggerated arch, the wide irrepressible mouth, the upper lip very curved, the lower lip very full; and, using a melodramatic phrase, her undaunted eyes."

Here Dr. Leigh must have obviously shocked himself by his own too romantic eloquence; and for several lines he gives us only meticulous description without any feeling behind. Then again he is curiously seized by inspiration: "She has an absurdly thin body; not only a boy's body, but a thin boy's body, lithe and supple and responsive, and with a comic tendency; a body not held up by dignity or muscular rheumatism, or anything, anywhere, ever. Heavenly legs" (says Dr. Leigh). Back again to the face, he cannot leave it alone. It is plain that, though he is not in love with Gervase Goldacre, she torments his imagination, and he is human enough to be irritated that Bernie should have claimed her, even for a short while. Had an ordinary pretty girl been offered to him as a sister-in-law, he would have tolerated the notion; but this tormenting tormented Gervase—perhaps it was not his heart which she reached out and touched, but the hidden poet in him. A hundred medical students would have laughed incredulously at the idea of a poet hidden in Alexander Leigh. His colleagues simply would not have recognised the possibility. And certainly, if indeed it were there, Gervase did not touch it tenderly with little snowflake fingers; rather say she scratched it

up and would not let it rest. . . .

"A face that is burlesquing itself all the time, except when it is serious. It will not settle down to the business of being beautiful. It could, but it will not. It will not even settle down to the business of being plain. A disturbing face. A face that makes all really beautiful, really serene, classical, noble women look silly. A face that keeps on saying: 'Why shouldn't I?' when it's making a most damned fool of itself. There are moments when it practically invites a boot to be ground on it. A face of sensibility without sense, and of prejudice without pride; of overdone courage and overdone valour for far too slight causes, and sudden relapses when it most needs courage. A face built of generosity and self-destruction in about equal parts, and bursts of arrogance when they are most damaging to herself, and impulsive bursts of affection and sweetness where they can do her no good at all.

"And her life, matching her face and not her profile, is totally lacking expedience. She will be hopeless over the daily shopping, but will probably die well, in whatever circumstances. I should diagnose" (says Dr. Leigh) "a temperament that would be disgracefully plausible about its own mistakes, building a swift, highly ornamental structure of reason and rationalisation and excuse, and then destroying it all by a laugh and a surrender, admitting idiocy. She has the disconcerting frankness of a gutter-urchin of seven, combined with the physical subtlety of a sophisticated siren completely at home in several worlds. . . . Sometimes you don't know what's the matter with her at all, until you find that for the day, or for the evening, she has drifted away into being quite a different person, only she has forgotten to tell you who she is being."

These last paragraphs are indubitably not Dr. Leigh at his best.

"One might know nothing about her past, but it looks as though it were a past that came out of a circus; a past that is striped like a zebra, painted like a clown, and always jumping through hoops. Yet in moments of crisis, her past will enable her to tread like a horse in the Haute Ecole, fastidiously disdaining the sawdust. She is poor, but one would say that she had been poorer. You get a feeling, from a pattern woven unconsciously into her conscious reminiscences, that as a child, instead of playing in a nursery, she has played a lot in the street.

"She does wild, mad, tomfool things, with an air as though they were going to hurt someone else, and she is glad of it, or sorry for it, as the case may be. Yet never seems to grasp the essential truth that they are also going to hurt herself."

—And you get a feeling, to quote Dr. Leigh himself, that here he has paused in his analysis; attempted to sum up Gervase Goldacre dispassionately; attempted it, and failed. He is not in love with her. He has been, for many years, in love with a married woman in London—though Mrs. Leigh does not know it, though no one at the Cliff House knows, except, to a limited extent, the Colonel. So he is anxious to come to an end of Gervase Goldacre, on paper, as he came to an end of her in reality; a bad end, a futile end . . .

"She is generous, impulsive, loves life, compassionate, vibrant with vitality, a ripple of laughter. If you get one depressed day from her, directly she begins to cheer up, her laughter comes in like a tide, like waves that roll higher and higher up the beach, and scatter in luminous crystal chips. She goes through the air like a rocket, and

comes down to the ground like a rocket, too. Yes, her spirit is a rocket that travels higher and higher, and when it begins to fall, bursts into a shower of stars, lovely for a moment, and then everything is dark.

"She really is very tired most of the time.

"(Ventriculin?)"

CHAPTER IX

By about the end of the first week in August, Clifford's Bay had surrendered. The Augs were there. The residents had adopted that queer attitude, unspoken yet pre-arranged, which was a dignified withdrawal to regions of mind and body not wholly unassailable by Augs, but rendered more so by a sort of wilful blindness, a stubborn refusal to recognise that during this period they were beaten out of their established dominion over land and the edges of the sea. It is humiliating, even for one month of the year, to defer to expedience, especially when expedience means Augs. "I don't believe there are quite so many this year," whispered the optimists. They were wrong. There were quite as many this year. There were more than last year. There would always be more than last year.

Sheila contributed a very effective little paper to the first number of *The Augan*, on the reaction of the residents as displayed by their conversation. Her uncle thought she had a distinct gift for social observation. He was particularly pleased with her description of the way, at the end of the Aug season, the residents of Clifford's Bay who had remained out of sight and as quiescent as possible, except among themselves, would appear with an air of: "Well, I think we may venture out now," and would talk brightly of how it would soon be October, and of how October was their favourite month. They pretended this was because of the blackberries and the lovely colours of the trees. "And we sometimes get such wonderful weather in October," they added, implying that won-

derful weather was wasted earlier in the year.

* * * * *

Extracts from Vol. I, No. 1, of "The Augan."

Pastimes and Diversions among Augustans:

(a) *Flying kites*, even when there is no wind.

(b) *Eating ices*, in the rain.

An important contribution to this particular section is made by Miss Sapphire Dripp, who remarks on their dislike, not violent, but noticeable, for (c) *kinemato-graph entertainments*. Without saying anything definite on the subject, they reveal by their actions that they prefer to see real people on a real stage; the concert party, the touring theatrical company are much more popular. Referring back to an earlier thesis, I am prepared to attribute this, once again, to the secret uneasiness of this race as to their own permanent reality, and their touching need for reassurance. They may easily be rendered slightly uncomfortable by the spectacle of film actors, without real substance, swelling and fading in a two-dimensional world. The desire of the whole Aug race to be assured of permanence, takes many other pathetic forms: Miss Dripp also points out that, most particularly, they enjoy having their (d) *photographs* taken, and are especially elated when they see photographs of Augs in action, in the local newspapers.

They are fond of (e) *Community Singing*: they are enamoured of their own voices, and, evidently, of one another's. And let it be remembered that the perpetual, causeless, loud calling from Aug to Aug, probably arises from their unacknowledged panic of losing each other during this month. By the same natural laws, one may

assume, that provide protective colouring for certain small animals, their names are usually monosyllabic and therefore well adapted for these calls: Pa, Fred, Ted, Bob, Alf, Art, Bert, Syd, Frank, Bill, Les, Stan.

Ma, Vi, Glad, Em, Else, Dot, Peg, Doll, Marge, Babs, Ruthie, Joanie, Jimmy, Billie, Gwennie.

(f) *Motoring*: This is a very recent amusement among the Augs, and one in which they take great pride as well as pleasure, demonstrated by the ranks of small cars to be seen all over Clifford's Bay during the season. But even here, their anxiety to give concrete proof of their existence is expressed in the "Mickey-Mouse" and other mascots which dangle at the back windows of their little saloons, stamping their existence on the minds of the other users of the road. (I am indebted for this piece of observation to Mr. Christopher Gordon Leigh, one of the Foundation Members of the Society.)

(g) *Reading*: Do the Augs read? It is demonstrable that they are attracted and buy any fiction which is bound in bright colours, but do they really read it? They go through the motions of looking at the print and turning over the pages; yet if questioned, it is doubtful if they would be able to tell one anything about it.

NOTE: a magazine, in Aug phraseology, is a "book," and a book is a "tale."

NOTE: The Aug word: a "piece" can signify a poem, a musical composition, or any form of the drama.

(h) *Writing*: Yes, they can write. They write quantities of postcards. To be popular, these should be crudely comic.

Tastes: The Augs' favourite colours, as Miss Sheila Margaret Leigh, President of the Society, has acutely observed, are pink and orange, separately or together. This taste has penetrated beyond their clothes, into their food:

lobsters, oranges, local "rock," raspberry Kola, coconut ice, etc.

Clothes: Their clothes are largely the same as ours, but cruder in hue and less serviceable; sometimes positively flimsy, as though they were not made or meant to last very long. The feminine element, so we may sometimes gather from the criticism of our own mothers and sisters, flaunt clothes that have been the fashion one or two or even three years ago, among real people at Clifford's Bay, and have since gone out and are rarely seen until the Aug season. Yet some characteristic preferences they have retained as long as can be remembered: Panama hats for men, and scarves tied round the head for the women; check caps, and caps-worn-back-to-front for the lads. An example of seasonal changes which might be considered in connection with their obsession for water and sailors, yet might, on the other hand, be traced to the modern yearning among Augs to be at all costs one hundred per cent American, is the delight of both sexes to don cotton hats known as "Buddy's caps," made in a shape reminiscent of the caps worn by the sailors of the American Navy. They frequently print on the front of these the name of the boarding-house or pension at which they are staying.

I have heard an Aug male congratulate an Aug young lady thus decorated, with the exclamation: "What ho, the snake's hips! Tray peequante! This style, one-and-eleven!"

—"Oo, Uncle Alec! You didn't really hear that?"

Alexander said coldly: "I have too much respect for *The Augan* to include anything that I cannot personally vouch for."

"You haven't done the bit about cream yet."

"You make Uncle Alec do it all!"

"Well, his style's better than ours."

"Thank you, Sheila."

"Don't forget to say that *I* thought of the cream evidence."

Alexander replied that he would not dare forget, considering the scenes that were raised if he omitted to attribute each discovery to Christopher, Sheila or Thomas, whichever happened to have made it. Sometimes, however, he allowed Sapphy's contribution to remain anonymous; Christopher and Sheila were not nearly so punctilious about that, and Sapphy too shy to insist.

Sheila said: "It wasn't all Christopher about the cream, was it, Uncle Alec? I noticed that when a dairy or a tea-shop was called a 'creamery' it was stuffed much fuller than it had been before——"

"And *I* told you how cook told me that when she was a landlady here, they simply insisted on 'real cream' every day for dinner, and were frightfully disappointed if it was custard instead."

"And *I* saw that they were always sending little tins of it through the post, wherever it says in the windows that it can be packed up and sent."

Thomas weighed in: "What about me noticing them round the barrow with 'cream ices,' ever so much thicker than anywhere else?"

"May I point out," from Dr. Leigh, "that the use of the slogan 'There's no cream where the Augs come from' was, originally, solely and exclusively my inspiration?"

"It was me," flashed Christopher, quenching the others, "that saw, before you put it like that, that all their flocking round wherever there's cream must mean that they don't often get it, in their—in their usual 'carnation. And

that's one of the first really good clues we've got about Aug country, when they're not in Clifford's Bay; that, and Uncle Alec's early bit about its being inland."

"Yes, but it isn't fair—Uncle Alec, is it fair? That's *my* School of Thought. Up till now, Christopher's belonged to the other one, the one that believes they dissolve or something, or at any rate don't exist between Augusts."

"I can belong to two Schools of Thought, can't I?"

"No, you can't!"

"Well, I do!"

"You might write that cream note now, don't you think, Uncle Alec, just to make sure that you've got all of us in it right," suggested his niece politely. And, to encourage him: "You write so clearly, even when you're in a hurry. I'm sure all the chemists can read *your* prescriptions."

Dr. Leigh began to scribble:

"The Augs have an unnatural passion for cream and everything connected with it. Thus implying that for them it has all the loveliness of novelty, and also some peculiar enchantment, a mysterious virtue in its properties. This cream fixation . . ."

"There's no cream where the Augs come from!" sang Christopher triumphantly. The phrase had become one of their pet slogans, spoken or sung, or muttered darkly through the teeth as they passed a "creamery" or a barrow overwhelmed with Augs.

Thomas had an idea.

"Does that song, 'Where do flies go in the winter-time?' really mean 'Where do Augs go?'? Does it?"

Christopher and Sheila and Dr. Leigh looked at each other, stunned. Their silence was a tribute to the natural genius of the only half-member of the society.

Christopher recovered first: "I suppose it might be said to, don't you think?" He made his voice seem as casual as possible, but, by Jove! this was a brilliant discovery! an important discovery!

"Mr. Thomas Gordon Leigh," wrote Alexander, "maintains that in the popular song, 'Where do flies go in the winter-time?' the word 'flies' is a mere euphemism to conceal 'Augs,' and that students of local folk-song will have no difficulty in tracing references to the periodic invasion of the Bay."

Thomas sighed with satisfaction. "Yes, that's what I meant."

Christopher had to have a tooth out with gas. When he began to come round, he remarked to the dentist, Mr. Brooke: "It's the Brigade, you know, who really suffer; the entertainers and all of them. They simply dare not sit down during August. They've got to keep on. The Augs have got to be kept happy—they've *got* to be. Granny and Grandpa can stop quietly in their own garden if they want to, till the time's over. But the Brigade——"

"Yes, yes, old chap. Try spitting in the big basin now."

Christopher spat and bled and babbled on, his head still swimming: "Cook was one of the Brigade, once, when she was a landlady for the Augs. When she got the letters, saying 'We're coming!' and 'Expect us!' and 'Please get in some beer,' she tried to rest as much as she could, because there'd be no more till the second week in September. If they stopped, any of the landladies or the entertainers, for one single moment, something might have happened long ago. Something awful."

"Like to see your tooth? Here it is. Big fellow, isn't it? Say good-bye to it."

"Uncle Alec's worked it out that if they only live for a month, they're twelve times as strong as real people, who have to keep enough over for the other eleven months and mayn't use it all up in one. That's why the Servers are so afraid. I saw them all just now, in rows and rows, tapping the barometer, hundreds of barometers, that wouldn't keep still. Augs don't like to sit indoors, you see—you do see, don't you?"

Nurse was waiting downstairs. She had not come up with Christopher, because blood made her sick; and Amyas Brooke had had enough of that, last time she had brought one of the Leigh children. He preferred to manage alone.

"Perhaps one year it might rain all through August, for thirty-one days, rain and rain and rain, and instead of vanishing in an Aug train, sort of satisfied till next year, the Augs might stay and they might rise up. That's why it says in our paper that there's more sunshine in Clifford's Bay than all round the coast. If the Augs *read* that there's lots of sunshine, they might think there is, even if there isn't. Do *you* think it's going to rain all this August? Have you got a barometer? Cook says that sometimes her legs simply couldn't carry her, but she had to go on. They don't mean it, she says, but there's no end to what they want. Shall I tell you what I dreamt, Mr. Brooke?"

"You've told me already, old chap. Rows of barometers, wasn't it? And the barometers wouldn't keep still."

"It wasn't only them," Christopher frowned, and thrust away the tumbler with its little fizzing tablet of pinkish antiseptic. "Not only landladies, but the whole Brigade of Servers. A sort of army, to protect the Bay. Only it's not so clear now. I knew a minute ago, only you would keep

on making me wash out. There were men shouting with barrows, and, I think, waitresses and—and deck-chair men, and donkey-boys, and the man with the doughnut tray, and Sapphy Dripp and her father—who else was there?” He stared hard at Brooke. “You’re not one, are you? Though you do wear a white linen coat. Or are you? No, of course you’re not, or we wouldn’t be sent here. Then who else *was* there?” He was nearly crying with the effort to recapture the fleeting dream he had had while under gas, and join it with all that which had already been assembled about that fantastic, fascinating tribe. “I know—we were all digging breastworks in the sand, Sheila and Sapphy and me and Thomas, to keep the Augs out. Thomas had only half a spade. That was all right, because he’s only half a member. They had to be ready by the first of August, though we weren’t sure if the Augs would arrive that day. They don’t always. Uncle Alec says there are two Schools of Thought. And then there was a shout: ‘To the creameries!’ and we were struggling in a great, thick sea of cream, because the tide had come in and it got into my nose and eyes and ears, and someone caught hold of me and pulled like anything, and I tried to say ‘Don’t, I mustn’t speak to you; you’re an Aug!’ but I *did* want to be pulled out of the cream, and—and—Augs, you know. Augs,” he repeated truculently to Brooke, busy washing his instruments, “Uncle Alec’s got it all written down.”

“Good. Then there’s no need for us to worry, is there? Head still swimmy?”

Christopher’s head was still exceedingly swimmy.

* * * * *

Brooke had a men’s bridge four, that evening, in his

rooms above the surgery; but they broke up early, because Bernard Leigh said he had to go to the Esplanade Hotel, to keep an eye on his little girl:

"Shan't be a bachelor much longer, you know. You chaps'll have to find another fourth, or else admit a lady. My little Gervase could knock spots off all of us at contract."

And Nathaniel Cooper, not meaning to be tactless, said in his whispering, confidential voice, rich with useless stresses: "Do you *know*, I'm not at all *sure*, I don't know how it *is*, but I'm not at all *sure* that it would be at all the same thing, with a lady playing; because if we had *one* lady, we should have to have *two*, shouldn't we? I mean we couldn't just have one, could we? And then two of *us* would have to cut in, or the other lady might have a husband, *too*, which would make three to cut in. Of course, that's almost another table, so it *wouldn't* be the same, would it? So we'd better enjoy it while we can."

"Can't you stop for one more rubber, Bernie?"

Bernie, looking haughtily at Nathaniel Cooper, repeated that no, if Brooke didn't mind, he had promised Gervase. She looked out for him at about this time, and could sometimes spare him a dance. And Cooper, not realising that he was in disgrace with Captain Leigh, said that if Brooke didn't mind, he'd walk as far as the hotel with old Bernard, and then get along home. "Because I wasn't quite pleased with the way my *father* looked after his *dinner*, to-night. You know, he's all I've got left, except my little girl, and he was a bit flushed, and when one's a *widower*——"

"You're both widowers, aren't you?"

"Yes, that's what I *meant*. Good night, Alec. Good night, Brooke. Sorry that finesse didn't come off. Better

luck next time. Those Leigh brothers have it all their own way, don't they? I believe—I really do believe they've got a *code*!" And giggling mildly at the joke, Nathaniel Cooper departed, with Bernard Leigh stalking rather stiffly and silently beside him.

Brooke poured himself out another whisky and soda.

"Your young nephew spilt a queer lot of nonsense when he was coming round from gas, in my surgery this morning. You came into it, along with the cream and the cooks and barometers. He said you'd got it all written down." And he repeated what he could remember of the boy's jumble.

Alexander was deeply interested. He supposed he would get it all presently for *The Augan*; but this business of a Serving Brigade who stood between the Augs and the residents, and wore themselves out keeping the Augs happy, was a new exuberance of Christopher's mind, which obviously would not have emerged in front of Brooke, if gas had not helped to make him indiscreet. Brooke might as well know the rest now, with Alexander's own reasons for continuing the game instead of shattering it:

"I thought it might be useful for them to sublimate fear into action, if you'll forgive the jargon."

"That's all right. I've seen that they were pretty inhibited up at your home."

"Pseudo-feudal is the word; not a very pretty one."

"How long have they been in that house, then? I didn't grasp that it was an ancestral property."

"It isn't. That's what I meant by 'pseudo.' Mind you, they're perfectly sincere in their possessive feelings, though Father only bought the Cliff House about thirty years ago. They've got the seaside-house equivalent for a manorial complex. Nothing in Clifford's Bay belongs to them, ex-

cept just the house and garden, and it isn't as though they'd built the house or planted the soil, either. And yet if you suggest to them that they should go somewhere else, now that the Bay has become a popular resort, you get the same sort of stubborn reaction as if the Leighs and their property here had begun in the twelfth century."

"Well," argued Brooke, "if they feel like that, it's the same thing, whether they've an inherited right to it or not. You can't be reasonable about a sense of possession. As a matter of fact, I've felt possessive over an empty railway carriage that I've only been in for a couple of hours. I've felt it over a table in a restaurant. I've felt it over a rather special bathing cove that I've visited twice and called mine. You can hypnotise yourself into calling any place yours because you've settled there first, whether for half an hour or five hundred years. And then——"

"And then the Augs come."

Brooke broke from seriousness into laughter. "Augs—that's pretty good. Of course there are Augs. We've always known it, in a way."

"There are, and there aren't. We all know of the existence of Augs; we've seen them, watched them, heard them, touched them, even; but if we went up to any single one of them, and taxed him with being an Aug, the answer would be: 'Oh no, *I'm* not. But that's an Aug over there!' And so you'd go on and on, never finding an Aug, but still seeing them, watching them, hearing them . . . It *is* a mythical race, Brooke. And they're all round us all the time."

"It's an odd thing, that though they don't seem very familiar with our language, yet they don't seem very familiar with any other language, either. Why is it, do you think, that they've got that curious habit of using

archaic words and phrases?"

"Have they? I haven't got that yet. I'll put it in *The Augan*. What words and phrases?"

"Oh, 'I prithee hand me the gold-flake,' 'How dost, wench?' to the barmaid; 'Avaunt!' to the landlord at closing time."

Alexander contributed: "'A word in thy shell-like'—I've heard that."

"'A word in thy shell-like, fair maiden.'"

"It must be a side-shoot of their love for the antique. Ruins and Ye Olde and so forth. You can trace psychologically some of their more violent likes and dislikes, and some of 'em you can't. Their demented Frankophobia, for instance. Practically all Augs are in the grip of Frankophobia. Why?"

Brooke suggested: "The pre-Waterloo years: fear of Boney's invasion. Martello towers. Clifford's Bay would have been one of the first for a landing."

"It's survived with peculiar intensity, then, and more recent fashions have died out."

"Look here," said Brooke, leaning forward eagerly, "I've thought of something. *That's* why they thread their English with quantities of bad French. It's to score off the Frenchmen: 'Very ah-lah,' 'Parley-voo?' 'Gay Paree.'"

Alexander murmured gently to his pipe: "'Voulay-voo allay ay lay pickshers?'"

"If I can bring my fiasco," retorted Brooke. "Oh, it's perennial. I've seen it come back every year as long as I can remember. Over Americans, it's the other way round. Strong American bias. They use American slang appreciating it, not mockingly. 'Ain't you just the Whoopee Queen?'"

"'Sez you,'" Alexander slung back.

"‘Oh yeah? Say, baby, shall we step out?’"

"‘O.K., Chief.’"

"And here's a bit of special observation for *The Augan*—your pun, Alec?—only you'd better leave it anonymous: There's a fashion among Augs for American dentists. Dentists whom Augs honour with their reluctant visits—I'm not one of them—placard their surgeries with the sign 'American Dentist,' and that seems to lull their patients' fears. Mind you, I'm not stating that the dentists in question are not Americans. They may be. What I'm getting at is that if they were French dentists, they would have to suppress it."

Alexander shook his head. "Very odd . . ."

Half an hour later, the two men were still absorbed in the game, capping one piece of evidence with another, and within the boundaries of the fantasy, heartily enjoying themselves.

"In your opinion, Dr. Leigh, are there any marked physiological differences between ourselves and the Augs?"

"Well, the technical side of that subject is still obscure. I should say, however, that the Aug larynx appears to be less delicate than ours, that the Adam's apple is more prominent, and that they have a greater disposition to peel than we have."

"That, then, would account for the proverbial saying in Clifford's Bay: 'Peeling like an Aug.'"

"But as it happens, there's no such thing as *an* Aug. No such thing as *one* Aug. There's another point that's always puzzled me. Have Augs got memories?"

"Oh, surely. They remember quite clearly from one year to another that they've been here before. 'Don't you remember,' they say, 'Don't you remember, Ma? This is

where we picnicked, and Gus sat on something 'orrid and ruined his trousers, and had to wear his mackintosh for the rest of the day!' . . . All their favourite jokes are about adultery or nudity."

"I don't agree. They're a moral race, on the whole."

"They don't go to church," argued Brooke.

"Claustrophobia. They hate indoors. They don't mind open-air services on the beach. They join in the hymns heartily."

"But jokes are nothing to do with daily life, in the Aug code." In support of which, Brooke suddenly burst forth with a fresh discovery: "When they send postcards, they mark their bedroom windows with a cross. They——"

"My God, Brooke, how do you know?"

"They *do*! And if they don't add a facetious remark, at least their meaning is facetious and thoroughly low. But if you suggested to any one of them that they *meant* to indicate which was their bedroom window, for any sort of bedroom purposes——"

"They'd look completely blank, I suppose."

"No they wouldn't. They'd say: 'You're not nice to know.'" And Brooke flashed a broad triumphant grin at his friend. His eyes were sparkling. The way he suddenly brandished his cross-on-the-postcard theory reminded Dr. Leigh of his nephew Christopher. They got such a pace on, Brooke and Christopher, once they started. He, Alexander, stopped to verify and place his data methodically, and Sheila stopped to be polite, and Thomas till he was absolutely sure of what he meant to say, and even then he spoke slowly. But Brooke and Christopher. . . .

CHAPTER X

COUSIN NELLIE was sitting contentedly in a corner of a shelter on the esplanade, facing the sea. The mid-August sun beat through the dusty glass on to her cheek and shoulder and side, till she felt cosy and protected as a begonia in a conservatory. She was alone, but for once she did not mind much, though she could not help wondering why it was, being of a sociable spirit, and in a large household like the Leighs', she should be quite so often alone? Nellie had not known, until the vision of her Cousin Violet's friendship had sprung ready-made into her mind, how terribly she had longed, all these years, for another person, dimly envisioned with almost her own shape and size and years and interests, to be beside her, sitting, standing, walking, working and chatting; someone with the same enthusiasms, and the same comfortable little limitations ("I don't want a dreadfully clever friend)," the same hopes and preoccupations and disappointments; the same standards, too, and, indeed, not such very different clothes.

And here she was, not quite a year later, sitting by herself in the shelter, watching the merry crowds.

Cousin Violet would not come down to the esplanade in the mornings; nor, in fact, during the last three weeks, would she come down to the esplanade and beach at all. She said, when questioned, that she preferred her own garden. "But it isn't as though she were fond of gardening," mused her kith and kin, for that had been another—not exactly disappointment, nothing quite so poignant—

another surprise that Violet cared so little about her blooms. Cousin Nellie always called them blooms.

Dr. Leigh could have told her that his mother preferred herself as the only woman in a household of tall men. It was nicest for her when Sybil was away, visiting friends, as very often happened. But the presence of Cousin Nellie rather spoilt the picture of all these great broad-shouldered men rushing round after the frail, helpless little Violet, killing wasps for her, laughing at her weakness: "Aren't you a little goose of a Mumsie?" In fact, now, if Sybil were at home and Alec and Gordon in London, it made three women to two men, which was intolerable.

And then, Mrs. Leigh's favourite pleasures were on rather an ambitious scale. They glittered in her mind like the Rue de Rivoli after dusk. She could not understand Cousin Nellie's little bursts of excitement, like a soul clapping its hands, over the absurd, trotting pleasures of a seaside town. Either one was the Queen of New York, or the Belle of the Calcutta Ball and the Toast of the Mess, or one was bored. Any compromise was merely irritating. Nice for Sybil to have her elderly Cousin Nellie helping her so much in the garden, but: "Oh dear, on the whole we got on very nicely without Nellie! I can't understand why Alec likes her so much. Of course, he teases her about her passion for those dreadful parts of the Bay: the esplanade, the beach, and the pier, but he does it much more as though he were encouraging her, than making fun of her."

. . . "Tell me, Cousin Nellie, what do you *do* down there? You're such a secretive woman!"

"Cousin Alec, how can you? Why, it's one of my worst faults that I'm not good at keeping secrets. I try to, but

it seems to me that when a secret needn't be a secret, there isn't so much harm in telling it as when one sees for oneself that it has to be."

The Colonel and Sybil, who were present at the conversation, had both looked soldierly and incredulous. Surely there could be no honourable argument on the side of betrayal?

"Well, tell me, then, what do you do? Do you paddle?"

"Oh, Cousin Alec!" but she added: "though I'm sure it looks very amusing."

"You don't paddle. Well, do you listen to the niggers and join in the choruses? Do you put pennies in the automatic machines? Do you patronise the winkle barrow? Do you get yourself photographed in groups on the beach? Or"—he sank his voice to a respectful hush—"do you go in for competitions and win prizes? Ah, I believe I've guessed right. You're blushing!"

"Shut up, Alec," said Sybil, "as though one *could!*"

"What? Blush? One can. Blushing is . . ." But following his definition, he changed the subject, because the odd part of it was that Cousin Nellie really had blushed, and he wondered, in silent amusement, which of his accusations had hit the mark. "I expect she got herself weighed!"

Cousin Nellie had blushed, however, not because she had committed any of these crimes, not even the last, but because she would have liked to. All these merry crowds—and from her shelter she commanded a magnificent view of a whole panorama of noisy enjoyment—looked as though individually and collectively they were having such a glorious time. It wasn't only what they *did*, though their activity was amazing. It was that wherever she

looked, especially on one face or another, she noticed the same expression, which she could not quite define, except, clumsily, by saying that they looked as though they lived utterly and completely in the moment, neither harking back nor straining forward. Anticipation and memory had obviously very little to do with their happiness. Happiness was *here*, here and now: happiness in biting into this enormous doughnut; in the face turned up towards the faraway kite whose string was pulling at your hand; in leaning back against a breakwater, and idly throwing stones at a bottle or a stick with a pail on it; in standing up-ended, each foot on a different rock, scooping something out of a pool; in running down to bathe and calling the others to follow, and running back again, and posing, dripping wet, for a group photograph; in sitting in a little "motor-boat" on a tiny, enclosed pool, and hitting all the other "motor-boats" with which the pool was crowded, as you went round it; in making a wide circle of your party on the sands, and throwing a ball round it from one to another, ignoring the boundaries of other people's encampments. And the odd thing was, that, though here and there, a child squealed when trodden on, no one else seemed to mind or even to notice the fact that all the time, whatever they did, they were jostled and pressed together, hitting each other, stepping over each other, pushing each other in tiny bathing-boxes, bumping into each other even in the sea. And all this was perfectly good-humoured; they seemed to be unhurt by contact, and to enjoy themselves, not in spite of this jostling, but almost because of it. Cousin Nellie was puzzled; she was herself gregarious enough, but it seemed to her that the beach, which looked like a gigantic game, played in sections, was a little *too* crowded.

The only places which were not crowded were the shelters, because it was fine, although she noticed that a big black cloud was coming up. Then she smiled. This was so much better than the dour village where she had lived, where enjoyment was no more than a dour lust, and a dour disapproval of each other's lusts. She gathered that the spectacle which was giving her so much pleasure, would not go on for ever. In fact, from remarks dropped here and there among the Leighs and their friends, she had collected that by the second week in September it would be practically over, and Clifford's Bay itself again. But Cousin Nellie hoped that they were wrong over this, and that the lively carnival might last for two or three months. She did not, in fact, see why not: "because the fine weather sometimes goes on right into October. Mrs. Arundel was saying so only this morning."

Though the fine weather might go on right into October, there was not quite enough of it to cover that morning. The heavy grey clouds which had been gathering for the last half-hour, now drew across the sun, blotting out the golden stream of light; and almost at once the first spots of rain splashed on to the asphalt in front of her. She remained where she was, rejoicing, as the rain grew worse, in her shelter, and in the childish agreeable sensation of being out of doors and yet indoors, close to the rain and yet quite dry.

The sudden change of weather produced a scurry, and the merry crowds were shaken into a different sort of activity. Many rushed up on to the esplanade and into the cafés; others, saying loudly that it was nearly time for lunch anyway, "By the time we've run up to the caff and back, fifty times!" swept their families and their families' paraphernalia home to their lodgings as quickly

as possible—"You can't take that 'ome with you. Look what our Les wants to take along 'ome with 'im! Mrs. 'Awkins would have a fit. Leave it be, there's a good boy.") The Arcade, with its little glittering junk-shops ("Noted House for Presents"), shooting-gallery, and other entertainments, gave protection to many of the younger people; and of those who stayed on the beach, some pretended it was not raining at all ("Don't let's go up. It isn't going to be much. If we go up we shan't never come down again this morning!"). Those who had bathing-boxes, crowded into them ("We're not going home *yet!* Oh, *Mum!* They haven't sung 'Sissy, can you spare a pin?' yet. They always sing it last." "Oh, very well. What a boy it is for the niggers!") and some cowered under the breakwaters with newspapers over their heads ("There now, I *wanted* to bring an umbrella, but you—"—"Oh, Moth-er, you can't take an umbrella down to the beach!"—"Yes, I can, if you'd let me!")

Older people bustled into the shelters. In a few minutes the shower was over; but even before it was over, at the first signs of blue sky, the groups who had taken refuge in shelters, cafés and arcades, streamed out again, as though they had been hardly able to bear confinement. And Cousin Nellie found herself once more alone, except for one small lady, who might really have been a duplicate of herself, so alike were they in size, general air, and even their style of clothing. The little lady was seated next to her, and, having started her crochet, remained comfortably settled where she was. She must have been about fifty-seven, and had a neat shape, rather more plump than thin. She was nicely, though not expensively dressed in a grey tweed skirt with flecks of mauve and green in it,

a fresh white blouse, and a knitted violet silk cardigan. A scarf was twisted twice round her neck, of patterned green and violet and white; and crowning her fresh rosy face and fairish hair gone grey, was a not unbecoming hat in shiny black straw, with a small brim, trimmed with a close wreath of mauve stocks.

Cousin Nellie's own skirt was black-and-white tweed, making grey; her knitted silk cardigan was a paler shade of mauve, and her blouse was striped white and mauve silk. She wore a scarf twisted twice round her neck, in a pattern of pink and lavender; and the little black straw hat which crowned her cherubic face, pink cheeks and darkish hair going grey, fuzzy round the edges, was simply trimmed with a mauve-and-white ribbon twisted round it. Between her and the small crocheting lady lay two dark-mauve silk umbrellas—her own, with a plain polished handle, and the stranger's, which had a green parrot handle with a red eye.

A small child with a very large umbrella was dragged noisily past the shelter. The sun was shining on the wet asphalt, but the little boy refused to put his umbrella down, or to let his mother put it down for him. So they swept by the two ladies: a big struggling woman and a small struggling boy, with an enormous wet umbrella between them, arguing:

"It's my parachoot, Ma!"

"Come on, Alf, it's just an umbrella. Look, the sun's shining!"

"It isn't. It's a parachoot. I shall be killed if I shut my parachoot."

"You'll be half-killed if you don't."

The struggling, swirling pair swept by the shelter, and out of sight. Cousin Nellie caught the eye of the small

lady sitting beside her in the shelter, and they both smiled indulgently.

"Children are such funny little things, aren't they?"

Cousin Nellie was delighted that the other had spoken. She agreed that children lived quite in a little world of their own, and did not seem to mind whether it rained or not. "All the same, for the sake of everybody else, I'm glad it was only a shower."

"Quite a sharp shower, though. They come up so suddenly. And on our first day, too."

"Your first day? Dear me, then I hope it will be fine for the rest of the time. Are you here for long?"

"Only till the twenty-seventh, I'm afraid. I wish it could have been longer. But my brother and the young folk have to be back, and Mrs. Black and I wouldn't enjoy it very much without them."

"You're a large party, then? How nice." Cousin Nellie did not realise that she herself, in a sense, was one of a large party.

"Oh yes. *Quite* a large party. We always are, at this time of year. There's my sister-in-law and my brother and their two girls, Jimmy and Glad, and, of course, the younger children, and Mr. and Mrs. Green; they always come away with us; and the three boys always join the party, too, especially now that Les and Glad are almost engaged. That's Ruthie, running along there!" She pointed out an emerald beret in the distance, the owner fairly indistinguishable from a group of other berets and buddy's hats, panamas, and bright knotted handkerchiefs, on the beach. But Cousin Nellie said, naturally: "What a pretty little girl. She's your niece?"

"Oh no," placidly, "Ruthie's not my niece. She's Mr. and Mrs. Green's daughter—their only daughter. No, but

Reg is my nephew; Reg and Len. We're all devoted to Reg; he really is a splendid boy. 'Though I oughtn't to call him a boy any longer; Reg is twenty-six."

"I expect he thinks that's older than it really is."

Cousin Nellie and Reg's Auntie Lou smiled at each other again, in perfect agreement over the youthfulness of youth.

"Why, I sometimes think of Alexander as a boy, and that's much more absurd, because Alec must be over forty. He's a very famous doctor, Dr. Alexander Leigh—I dare say you've heard of him?"

Auntie Lou was politely sure that she had heard of him. "And is he your nephew? You must be very proud of him."

"Dear Alec! No, he's not exactly my nephew. He's my first cousin's son. I live with my cousin, Mrs. Leigh, and her husband, Colonel Leigh, here at Clifford's Bay."

"All the year round?" A rather queer note in Miss Black's voice; not exactly surprise that one should live at Clifford's Bay all the year round, and not exactly envy, but the two slightly blending with deep interest.

"Oh, yes. Though, of course, it's not always as lively as it is now. I enjoy watching people enjoy themselves, don't you?"

"Yes, very much indeed. My sister-in-law always tells me that I'm too quiet and don't join in enough, but I tell her that it doesn't follow, if one doesn't join in, that one isn't enjoying it just the same."

"Oh, I *do*, I *do* agree. Though I expect my cousin, Mrs. Leigh, would say exactly the opposite, and that I joined in *too* much." And then Cousin Nellie wondered why she had said that, for, after all, it was not quite true, and

it had never happened yet, but the tone of Violet Leigh's voice reprimanding her was as vivid as though she actually heard it. "Do you ever," she impulsively asked her new friend, "do you ever feel that you know what's going to happen to you next, exactly as though it had happened to you before?"

"Yes, I do. It's queer that you should have felt it, too. It's very seldom anything important, though; just some silly little thing. I felt it only this very morning. Reg was just going out for the paper, and the three boys had already been out to get it, and my brother said: 'Here come the lads of the village! No need for you to go, Reg,' and I knew for certain that Reg would go to knock out his pipe on the mantelpiece and knock over the ornament with the pheasant painted on it, just as Mrs. Meaker came in with the bacon and eggs! And he did!"

"How interesting! Yes, that's just what I meant. Even though you've never been in that room before."

"Oh, we have. We always have the same rooms, except the Greens, and they go to the Marine View Hotel, next door to the Esplanade. They like it better, and my brother's family's pleased, too, because they say it makes it so much easier for all of them to go to the Esplanade dances whenever they want to, though I must say I don't quite see why it should. Being next door's not the same thing as being in the hotel itself."

"My cousin's other son, Bernard, is engaged to the young lady entertainer at the Esplanade—Miss Gervase Goldacre."

"Is he really? Jimmy and Glad made the boys take them last night, although we'd only just arrived, and they were teasing Reg about her this morning. He *will* be disappointed to hear that he's too late. Jimmy and Glad

say she has such lovely hair, and knows all the new dances."

"They change the dances so fast nowadays. Now when *we* went to balls——"

* * * * *

Cousin Nellie was very unpunctual for lunch that day at the Cliff House, and the Colonel was displeased.

The two ladies had planned happily to meet the very next morning at the Devonshire Creamery at eleven o'clock for coffee together, though Auntie Lou said humorously: "I like coffee, but it doesn't like me," as they sat cosily at the little marble table; so she drank milk instead. A biscuit was included in the price of the coffee, *or* a cigarette! But they both chose to eat sponge-cakes instead, and Auntie Lou described to Cousin Nellie what good food they had at their rooms, and that was why her sister-in-law insisted on always coming back to them. "Cream at dinner every night! *Real* cream." Her voice was a little fierce, as though instead of real cream she had once been put off with marshmallow. "Of course, it's a tight squeeze there, but we put up with that."

And after their delicate orgy at the Creamery, Auntie Lou wanted to change her book, and introduced Cousin Nellie to the little private circulating library in a side street, where, for twopence and no deposit, you could choose from at least three dozen novels. Cousin Nellie felt very much of a stranger at Clifford's Bay, not having discovered this for herself. She had been wanting some books to read, apart from those which Mrs. Leigh brought from Boots', read, and instantly returned in her vague, dreamy, unapologetic fashion, directly she had finished them, whether Cousin Nellie had started one or not. And

then they trotted off to the Scotch Wool Shop, and chose crochet wool. Auntie Lou had promised to lend Cousin Nellie the pattern which she had so admired in the shelter. And then they went down to the pier and bought seats together for that evening's performance of *The Humble Servants* concert-party, which had arrived at the beginning of the month, and were now at the height of popularity, so that there was a little difficulty about squeezing in their claims, but they managed it, and by a piece of luck got very good seats. And then, laughing gently at their own foolishness, they put pennies into an automatic machine which promised to tell their characters by little cards which tumbled from a slot. Cousin Nellie's began: "I see that you have had a varied and eventful life, and have experienced many vicissitudes of fortune." And she remarked thoughtfully that it was true, in a way, though in a way it wasn't. "You are, however, nearing a turning-point in your affairs, that will put you on the high road to success, fortune and happiness."

And Auntie Lou's began severely: "I see that you are of a very suspicious nature."—"I'm *sure* that's not true!" she interrupted herself indignantly.

"No, of course it isn't!" Cousin Nellie looked over her shoulder. "They're only nonsense." And sympathetically skipping: "You must learn that it is a mistake to mistrust everyone because of the failings of one person," she went on to: "You are generous to a fault, and to this you owe your great popularity both with your own and with the opposite sex."

"Well, now we know all about each other, don't we?"

"Well, I don't know. I felt I knew you already without any help from a penny card."

"Yes, so did I. Isn't it funny?"

And then they parted for lunch, in plenty of time, to-day, to placate the Colonel; and made an appointment to meet for early tea and a walk, after they had both had a rest.

This day was a symbol of those that followed. Their friendship gathered impetus as easily as though they were both running downhill hand-in-hand. There was a growing wonder for each of them in discovering that the other found pleasure in doing exactly the same things as herself.

This ecstatic alliance lasted without any opposition, heavenly or earthly, for about a week. Influenced by Lou's wild, gay extravagance, Nellie began a collection of Goss china, which she had always secretly admired very much; but the only time before, when she had wanted to purchase a piece of it, Sybil had been with her, and Sybil had somehow conveyed that Goss china was not done. But in Lou's circles it was done very ardently, and it was a revelation to Nellie what quaint and delicious little bits of china you could buy, stamped with Clifford's Bay arms: gramophones and watering-cans, bulldogs and Dutch shoes.

"But these are what——" Sheila checked herself. She had been going to say, fingering the collection on Cousin Nellie's dressing-table: "These are what Augs collect," but she altered it to: "But these are no *use!*"

"Well, no, I suppose not, dear, but things can be pretty without being useful, can't they?"

Sheila, a miniature china gramophone in her hand, was doubtful about this, but manners forbade her saying any more.

Ruthie, on the contrary, the Greens' flapper daughter, who was only a year older than Sheila Leigh, but seemed at least eighteen, screamed appreciation over every new

and fascinating addition to the Goss china collection. They had other collections, too, though less concentrated. Nellie loved and was fascinated by the sea as much as Lou; and it was equally a novelty to her; so they both collected and took home bright coloured pebbles and little gleaming shells. Their special favourites, while shell-hunting, in black sand-shoes, one hand holding up as much as possible of their skirts, were tiny perfect shells, not half as big as their little finger-nails, lined with mysterious mother-o'-pearl; and peculiar long, slender, and exquisitely pointed mauve shells. There was much rivalry over the finding of these, and soft cries of triumph. They also took home a certain species of feathery, dark red seaweed, which looked nothing at all taken out of the water; but directly you put it in your wash-basin, it spread and rippled, which was like having the whole seaside in your own bedroom. And each lady admitted to her friend a shy liking for those captivating shells that murmur and distantly roar like the sea when you hold them close to your ear; shy, because Lou felt that these toys should have more concern with children than with grown-up and sensible women, and Nellie because of a remark her Cousin Violet had once made.

The climax of this sea adoration was the paddling adventure. Neither of them had actually paddled before. They had had their feet often in the water, but their feet had not been bare, and shoes made all the difference. But they gradually grew more daring as they realised that things you wish in vain to do when there is only one of you, can quite easily be done when there are two. Before Lou appeared, Cousin Nellie had been a bit lost and forlorn; had found it harder than she expected, in spite of her friendly genial ways, to settle down at Clifford's Bay.

But now that she had found Lou, each day was warm with satisfaction and brilliant with fun. They grew braver and braver in their approach to the sea. From being mere passive observers from shelters or deck-chairs or from their little walks on the esplanade, they moved down to the beach and watched the bathers, and grew intimate with their idiosyncrasies, and began to know them all by sight and to have little jokes about them; and from the beach they moved to the rocks, desiring to be more active participators; and from the rocks down to the tide's very edge; and then deliberately, their shoes removed, and given, laughing, into the charge of Mrs. Black, the small clear waves were allowed to run up over their ankles, tickling and caressing them. As it happened, they both had small pearly feet and very pretty ankles.

So much for their pleasure in nature. On a more worldly side, they would meet and listen to the band; and that, in its turn, developed into the most daring of all their outings; when they put on little semi-evening dresses, not quite *décolletée*, both in figured *crêpe de Chine*, with little black bridge-coats and velvet evening shoes with low heels and square sparkly buckles, and went to the Esplanade Hotel, and sat at a little table, and drank coffee, and watched the young folk dance and enjoy themselves.

They were overcome with soft laughter when they saw some of the Esplanade guests, all dressed up for the evening, and recognised them as bathers whose antics they had watched every day on the beach. "Look, Nellie, there's the fat man who plays leap-frog in the water; and do you see over there—it's the girl whose dog tried to eat a crab!"

Gervase, at the hub of all the fun, waved to them, so

that they felt very grand, and smiled at her across the dancing-floor, but did not beckon her, because she was so frantically busy: dashing about introducing people, over and over again, to make sure that every single fragment of the human kaleidoscope was having a good time; collecting strays from the lounge and corridors and writing-rooms; breaking up families; having quick conferences with the band leader; and, whenever events seemed spinning a little too slowly, whirling them up into a "Paul Jones." . . . "Come along, everyone must dance Paul Jones—we can't let you off! Ladies outside, gentlemen go round this way!" . . . superintending the ebb and flow of the lights, that the result might be as sensuous and exciting as possible; and—her most courageous task—skilfully detaching and then scooping up a reluctant girl sitting with her family, the girl perhaps guessing the lady entertainer's difficulty better than the mother, who always said: "Go along, dear, go and dance. Enjoy yourself. You don't want to sit with us all the evening. Miss Goldacre will find you a partner," and Gervase swept her away with a protective arm, and a backward "I'll-look-after-her" look at the parents. Only twice in the evening's carnival might one have been given a glimpse of a Gervase Goldacre with higher standards of sophistication than was demanded by Clifford's Bay's best hotel in August; once when she danced an exhibition dance with one of the orchestra, a foreign boy, whom she had discovered could partner her marvellously in the most modern demonstrations, so that she could relax into being up-to-date, instead of carefully and artificially remaining two years behind the times; and once when she cried: "Oh, blast you, Gus, keep out of my way! My God, you know I've got my job to keep. Always floundering and flapping round my

feet—can't you see I've got to make all these people look as though they're enjoying themselves?" It rang out in a clear, natural and impatient voice, strangely different from the one she had been using the rest of the evening. The victim was one of a throng of common, very callow men staying at the Esplanade, who, unable to understand that a lady entertainer is never free of her duties, were continually pestering her to devote exclusive attention to them and their somewhat suggestive invitations. Lou and Nellie and a few other people heard.

"*Well!*" exclaimed a stout lady, mother of one of the dancing daughters, sitting at the next table, "fancy giving way to temper like that! *Her!*"

Lou and Nellie exchanged troubled glances, but were too courteous to make any comment. But Cousin Nellie looked over towards Bernie, who had dropped in for half an hour just to watch Gervase; for, unlike the cub offender, he knew well enough that even though he was her accepted fiancé, he must not interfere with her time while she was still employed by the management of the Esplanade, though he frequently discoursed to her, at other times, on his feelings when he saw her at the beck and call of every damned awful Tom, Dick and Harry: "God! to get you away from all this. . . . And it's not going to be long now. Before Christmas, I swear! . . . Make you forget. . . . You won't ever have to. . . . God! There's nothing more fierce than for a man to have to stand by helpless! . . ."

"Then don't come to the hotel," Gervase advised him very sensibly. "We know it's got to last until the end of the season. I haven't a sou, and I need the cash for my debts. But I don't want you to make yourself miserable, my sweet."

"Oh well, I'll be there if you want me . . . just a faithful old watch-dog!"

Reg was a visitor; not, like Bernard, a resident; so it was compatible with Gervase's duties that she should dance with him. Nellie and Lou were leaving sedately, and still thrilled by their intoxicating experience, at about a quarter to eleven. They paused in the doorway and watched for a moment. Gervase's cyclamen chiffon skirts floated out from the scintillating sheath of her very low-cut evening dress, and above her they saw the delighted grin on Reg's handsome face, and his brilliant fire-coloured hair, almost purple where he had greased it and plastered it down.

His Auntie Lou was about to remark that they made a fine-looking couple, when she remembered that it was not Miss Goldacre's business to make a fine-looking couple with anybody except Nellie's Cousin Bernard.

They did not go to the Esplanade again, in spite of its sophistication. They found the concert-party more fun, especially discussing it next morning. Their usual rendezvous was the same shelter where they had first met, when there was time to do a cross-word together, or exchange the written formulæ of new games of patience, before they went for their elevenses. Besides the regular elevenses, they were always having little illegitimate meals of sponge-cake or pears at odd times. But the morning after they had been to the concert-party, they were bubbling over with reminiscences and criticisms, and neither cross-words nor patience were needed. They discussed each one of the "Humble Servants" separately, each of their turns and each of their songs, and the effect of each upon the crowded, hilarious audience. And Lou remembered when she was a young girl, a similar con-

cert-party—"only, of course, we should both think them very old-fashioned now"—called "The Baby Buntings," and the chorus of a very favourite song of that moment. She sang it now, laughing at her own sentimentality, to Nellie, who marvelled at her remembering not only the air, but the words:

"She's twenty-one, or not quite that,
And not too round and not too flat,
She flirts with the thin, she flirts with the fat,
The giddy little girl in the big black hat.
She's love-like—she's dove-like,
She's an angel-from-the-above-like!"

"And the joke of it is that I used to think that it was composed and sung especially for me, because I was twenty-one at the time, and the Bunting used to look straight towards me."

"You had a much livelier girlhood than I. I certainly went to a few balls, but otherwise we were not allowed very much frivolity."

But this summer compensated for all the quiet years. Nellie seemed to herself younger in spirit than she had ever been before:

"I'm twenty-one, or not quite that
And not too round, and not too flat!"

And because they were both so happy, they both suffered from a slight over-desire to be helpful. If anyone asked them the way or the time, or if anything were lost and they were asked to help find it, they never rested until they had done something about it, long after they had been told that it didn't matter. People became

rather chary of asking them.

After about a week of this simmering intoxication, it occurred to Nellie, who had been introduced to the Blacks and the Greens and the Lads of the Village, and had been boisterously and genially received, and had had tea with them once or twice on the beach, never quite certain how many there were, nor exactly how they all fitted in, that she was being asked rather a lot of questions at the Cliff House as to the way in which she occupied her time; and that there was, in fact, a certain amount of atmosphere festooned invisibly round the enquiries. She thought, therefore, that she really ought to introduce Lou informally to the Leighs, as she herself had been introduced informally to the Blacks and the Greens. Mentally she clung to the word "informally" as though the sound of it might mitigate a vague dread of the introduction, a wistful hope that things might not "get spoilt." They could not fail to like Lou, because there was nothing whatever in Lou that anybody in their senses could possibly dislike. Oh yes, it would be quite all right if one day she brought her friend—informally—at tea-time in the garden, following their afternoon walk. But she was so absorbed in the idea of informality that she wholly forgot, until she and Lou were actually round the angle of the house and almost on the lawn behind, that this was the afternoon of the Leighs' tea-and-tennis party. Certainly there had been mention of it that morning at breakfast; but Cousin Nellie, only half listening, had had a vague idea that there was to be some festivity here at the Cliff House or in some other garden either to-morrow or the next day, and then had let it slip from her mind altogether.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Auntie Lou, "surely these aren't all your family?" But she would not have been surprised, had Nellie cried: "Yes, indeed!" She was used to large groups of two or three or even four families mingling as one, separating again, re-meeting, joining up, spreading, dwindling, more or less adhesive, more or less interdependent; and being, like Nellie, a sociable body, she was not in the least dismayed.

"Oh, dear!" cried Cousin Nellie. Then: "Well, what does it matter?" And then: "No, they're not all my relations. Some of them are friends. Yes, of course, what a silly mistake for me to have made. I remember now. Well, isn't this nice?" Her swift subconscious moment of apprehension faded. It *was* nice, not only that Lou should have the chance of meeting all the Leighs at once, but also the Leighs' friends, the Coopers and the Lampeters and the Maitlands, Dr. and Mrs. Bryant and their married daughters and all their children. Yes, and there were the Jennings—such a clever architect. He had built his own house, called "Gables," very appropriate, too. And Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Mann, Mrs. Jennings' brother and his wife. They had taken a villa called "Omdurman" for the summer, and were talking of settling down permanently at Clifford's Bay. When Nellie had pointed out the villa, Lou, who was very quick, had immediately cracked a funny joke, and had said: "Then they ought to be called the Omdur-Manns," and they had called the Herbert Manns the Omdur-Manns ever since.

There, seated in state beside Cousin Violet, was Miss Picton-Porter herself, the Colonel in attendance. A great many people were afraid of the old lady, for she was a bit of an autocrat, and preferred to live by herself at Rock-view Cottage, which Nellie thought very odd, but she

liked Miss Picton-Porter, all the same.

She screwed up her eyes against the sun to see who was playing tennis on the upper lawn, beyond the tea-table. There was only one court, but it was an excellent court; Sybil saw to that. Alec—yes, when he stopped playing she must introduce him to Lou. Dear, dear Alec, but, of course, he would be the lion of the party, and his tennis was magnificent, like a professional. He was partnering Miss Goldacre. Sybil had often said how odd it was that Gervase was such a weak player, considering how well she danced and how fast she ran, and her suppleness and length of limb; for certainly she did not play at all well. That was, no doubt, why they balanced the game by putting her with Alexander. On the other side of the net were Mr. Brooke and Norah Hamlin, Dr. Bryant's elder daughter, a very well-matched pair, neither so good as Alec nor so feeble as Gervase. Presently, when Lou had been introduced and had had her tea, they might go up and sit in the little open summer-house and watch the tennis. Two or three children were scuttling round picking up tennis-balls for the players: Christopher, erratically, and favouring his Uncle Alec with a surfeit of balls; Thomas, without much enjoyment; Jane Hamlin and Nathaniel Cooper's little eight-year-old daughter; poor Nathaniel was a widower, and Thalia had been called after him as nearly as possible.

The sun was shining, and it all looked delightful.

Sybil was pouring out, because her mother preferred to do nothing but sit back, rather grandly but appropriately dressed in a soft summery style which somehow contrived to frame as well as to clothe her. Cousin Nellie, therefore, immediately trotted her friend up to the hostess.

Even after twenty-five years, the first image that naturally dashed through Mrs. Leigh's mind was of Hugh—Hugh, who had been drowned because he *would* run away and play with tripper children. They had suspected, of course, for the past week or so, that Cousin Nellie, in her ignorance and simplicity, had picked up an undesirable friend and they had actually become inseparable; but summer visitors rarely stay longer than a fortnight, so it was hardly worth while to enlighten her. But that, without warning, this should have happened; that her cousin should have had the incredible foolishness to force this introduction——!

It was a shock, but Mrs. Leigh behaved well. A faint, frozen smile for Miss Louisa Black, a murmured invitation to sit down and be given a cup of tea—no handshake. Hugh. . . .

But if Cousin Nellie did not realise about Hugh, certainly Lou Black could not be expected to know for what, in a way, she was responsible. She simply thought Mrs. Leigh a nice-looking and very refined lady, though a bit pale, and what a pity she was so proud in her manner.

Colonel Leigh and his daughter Sybil exchanged glances. What was to be done? Could anything be done? This was appalling. Suppose Mother should faint? But no, it was all right. Mother had been splendid. Sybil's hand shook a little as she poured out tea for the new-comer and handed it to her, with a cool, non-committal remark about sugar and cream.

"Cream, but only one lump, thank you."

But luckily the deck-chair beside Lou was occupied by Mrs. Jennings, who, without much discrimination, and not realising at once that here was one of the hated class,

began the normal sort of chat about the weather, the good air at Clifford's Bay, and had Miss Black come from far, and how long was she staying at the Cliff House?

Auntie Lou, accepting a cream *éclair*, explained that they were only here for a fortnight—well, just over a fortnight, because of the extra week-end; that no, she was not staying with the Leighs. She was not at the hotel, either, though they could go as often as they liked, because Mr. and Mrs. Green were at the *pension* next door to it; but they were a rather large party, and always took the same rooms at Cottoneaster House, in Jarrold Road, not *quite* on the front, but round the corner from the band-stand and a little way up the hill.

"Oh," cried Mrs. Jennings, "isn't that where the Talbots were staying after they gave up their house?"

A hush had fallen on the rest of the company: so here, sitting among them, was a member of the very tribe who had so ruthlessly expelled the poor Talbots, simply because they insisted that they had to have the same rooms. As though any rooms wouldn't have done. The matter had been discussed among the residents in solid, loyal indignation. It was sad enough for the Talbots that they had had a house at Clifford's Bay all their lives, that they should have had to give it up last June, after losing so much money, and go into rooms until their daughter's child was born, and she could have them to live with her. But you can't always tell these things to the minute. It could only have been a question of stopping on at Cottoneaster House for an extra week or two, but Mrs. Meaker, the landlady, poor soul—they were all too terrified to do what they thought right, and no wonder!—when the truculent invasion began, said: "The Lord knows what'll happen if you cross 'em!" Mrs. Meaker had gasped,

apologetically, when she had made it more or less clear to the Talbots that there had been a mistake, that she had 'oped, that she didn't 'ardly reckon, that she'd done 'er best, but Mr. and Mrs. Black had been so set on the *same* rooms! All the weary trouble of packing up again and dragging their things somewhere else—oh, it was a shame, a burning shame! Poor Amy Talbot was not very young any more, and not very strong any more, and they had had all that worry. But what was the good of appealing to that class of person? They simply swept every consideration aside. They were ruthless, fanatical even, over what they wanted during their brief occupation.

"Yes," said Auntie Lou, shaking her head, "I'm afraid the rooms were let when we arrived. It must have been Mrs. Meaker's mistake, because my sister-in-law had written clear as anything to say on what date to expect us, and that we wanted just the same rooms as last year and the year before. Mr. Black, that's my brother, can't bear to think of staying anywhere else at Clifford's Bay. He's very affectionate, and gets easily attached to things. So it didn't seem fair that he should suffer because of the landlady's mistake. But I couldn't help being a little distressed, because the lady and gentleman seemed so fussed and worried at having to move out."

"Nelson . . . Nelson!" reflected Sybil.

"Hugh . . . !" thought Mrs. Leigh.

"Mrs. Meaker lives up to her name," remarked Miss Picton-Porter. "Wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Oh, I don't think so," put in Cousin Nellie, feeling that there was something in this unfavourable to Lou, which ought to be contradicted. She never minded contradicting Miss Picton-Porter. "Mrs. Meaker can be quite firm sometimes. What was it you were telling me about

her the other day, Lou? You know, that time when Reg knocked over the vase with the bacon and eggs on it, just as she came in with the pheasant?"

"Pheasant?" thought Mrs. Jennings. "She must mean grouse."

"Sheila," broke in Sheila's grandfather, "hand Miss Black the shortbread. Or ask if she would prefer raspberries and cream."

"Raspberries and cream, please."

The set was over; and Sheila, who had been watching, and Christopher and Thomas and the other children who had been picking up balls, had run across to the tea-table ahead of the players, who were still putting on their coats. Christopher was the first to realise the gorgeous, ecstatic, incredible thing that had happened. An Aug had come to tea! An Aug had been brought by innocent Cousin Nellie into the very stronghold of anti-Aug. What would happen? Would she be turned out? His grandmother was looking like a bit of crumpled green cheese. But if she, the Aug woman, were allowed to stay, what—*what* an opportunity to collect first-hand data! He gave Sheila a vehement nudge, almost upsetting her pretty composure. She was obeying the Colonel's command to hand refreshment to Miss Black, and she said, in her affected way when visitors were there: "Please don't, Christopher, I nearly spilt the cream."

Up till the moment when she said: "Cream," Christopher had not believed that she had grasped the immense piece of luck which had befallen them, but her inflection told him at once that they were in secret accord. He giggled and exclaimed: "Here, have some more!" and grasping the cream-jug after Sheila had poured out a normal portion, simply flooded Auntie Lou's plate.

Auntie Lou was a little surprised. "Thank you, my dear. I shall have to take off my gloves for this, shan't I? And how old are you?" to Christopher. "My nephew Len is thirteen. You two must meet sometime and have a game of cricket on the sands. And your sister? . . . Both my nieces are grown-up, but Ruthie, Ruthie Green, who calls me Auntie, is only—let me see, yes, Ruthie's fourteen. But you're not as old as that, are you?" misled by Sheila's small trim figure and childish curls. "Thank you, no more cream."

Christopher turned his back and moved away, exploding with laughter, which he had to stifle in case his grandmother saw him. Sheila tried to cover up his dreadful lapse by offering sponge-cake.

"Yes, thank you, my dear, just one piece. And now I'm sure you'd rather run away and pick up the tennis-balls than wait on me."

Sheila, who, next to her Uncle Alexander, was by far the best player present, and was simply waiting till the next set to distinguish herself, merely replied politely that she would be too tired to play if she ran about in between. "And, anyhow, that set's finished. Uncle Alec's side has won; he always does, whoever's his partner."

The four players had now joined the group round the tea-table, and were given long drinks to quench their thirst. Cousin Nellie, who all this while had been feeling unhappy, and drinking her tea, rather tired because she and Lou had had quite a long walk along the esplanade almost as far as Oldport, took the first chance of introducing her special nephew to her special friend. Dr. Leigh concealed his surprise, shook hands with Miss Black, and would have started a conversation, only he was

called away simultaneously by the three Miss Lampeters, the two Mr. Coopers, father and son, and Miss Picton-Porter, all eager for temporary possession of the Lion. Hertha Lampeter's voice was presently heard daringly asking him if anyone had ever told him he was like Gerald du Maurier? "Of course, you're fairer."

Gervase came towards Lou, smiling. She thought they were all being a bit stuffy to Reg Black's poor old aunt. "Did you see me making an awful fool of myself with a tennis-racquet?" she began gaily; but Bernie, who had been watching her play, bore her off rather swiftly to sit in the shade. "My God, darling," he said in a low voice, "you needn't do this when you're off duty as well. Heaven knows you get enough of it." He went to get her an iced drink, and suffered himself to be introduced to Lou as he stood near the table.

"This is my Cousin Bernard," said Nellie, "he plays the piano so beautifully."

Bernie shook hands, smiled slightly, and hurried back to Gervase with lemonade. She was leaning back in her deck-chair, looking softly starry and yet burning. Bernie sat down on the grass beside her.

"I'm coming down to the hotel to-night, my Gervase."

"Oh, Bernie! It's so much more sensible of you to keep away while I'm on my job."

"I've tried! I haven't been down there since the other night when we agreed that it was best for me not to come. But it's worse, imagining things, not knowing whether you need a strong arm. I tell you, the dogs and I have tramped for miles, these last four nights, trying to do without a glimpse of you."

"My sweet, you shouldn't worry. They're only a set of hyenas down there. I can manage 'em."

"They're working you to death! I must come to-night if it's only to watch you; just to be there, just to be your patient old spaniel."

"Much better not . . . Oh, well, what does it matter?"

Bernie leaned nearer to her and began describing a dream he had had two nights before.

Disappointed in her cousin's response to Miss Lou Black, Cousin Nellie then caught sight of Amyas Brooke.

"Mr. Brooke—Miss Black."

Before the introduction was completed, Brooke turned brusquely away in the opposite direction and said to Mrs. Leigh: "That was a good fight. I'm sorry you weren't watching. We were within two points of victory once. I must be going. Good-bye, and thanks very much. Oh, by the way, Colonel, haven't we got a match on to-morrow? I'll pick you up at two, if that suits you?"

The Colonel made some jocular reference to the fact that tooth-ache must give way to golf. Brooke laughed, spoke a word or two to Sybil, and departed. But he had given the others the lead they wanted. Thereafter they all contrived that they need not speak to Miss Nellie Burton's friend; even the Lampeters, even Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, even Nathaniel Cooper, who did not like unpleasantness and so at all times shut his eyes to it, followed the other residents' example, feeling confident that by so doing they were on the right side with the dear Leighs.

To dispel the air of discomfort which suffused their usually placid afternoon garden-party, Sybil remembered that Miss Picton-Porter had not yet heard Thomas recite Leigh Hunt's *Abou Ben Adhem*. Sybil was very proud of her own heroism in suggesting that this would be a

suitable moment for Miss Picton-Porter to share that ecstasy with the other residents of Clifford's Bay. A recitation from Thomas would fill up the pockets of awkward silence and help poor Mother to recover her scattered composure; and perhaps when Thomas had finished, it might occur to that woman to get up, say good-bye all round, and go away.

The chorus of ladies present were all in favour of a recitation from Thomas. Sybil remarked in a low voice to Mrs. Jennings: "He really does it quite well, you know, sometimes; not always. It depends if he's in the mood."

Everyone looked towards Miss Picton-Porter, who metaphorically occupied the Royal Box for this occasion; and she, though aware that she might expect little positive pleasure from hearing Thomas Leigh recite *About Ben Adhem*, was prompted by her witch-like sense that it was good for children to be put through the mangle, to cry with exaggerated stress that nothing could possibly please her more, and did Thomas also know *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, by Mr. Robert Browning?

Luckily Thomas did not. *About Ben Adhem* at least only took up half a page in the poetry-book. Even so, he resisted on principle. Sheila encouraged him with her most elder-sisterly smile and a reassuring whisper: "Go on, Thomas! It's all right. I'll prompt you whenever you forget. I know every line of it." Nevertheless, Thomas bitterly disliked the plan. Well he knew what his aunt could never be brought to see: that his were not the bones and blood of an actor. An explorer, perhaps; a soldier, maybe; a mechanician, likely as not; a wheelwright, possibly; but an actor—

"Thomas, I'm ashamed of you. Don't make such a fuss. Sheila will speak the Angel's lines, if you like, as

she did last time, just to help you. Come on now, we're all waiting. 'Abou Ben Adhem, may his tribe——' "

Thomas breathed hard and looked longingly down the garden-path towards the house.

"Oh, *that* piece? How nice!" Miss Lou Black exclaimed. "Why, I know it. I know it quite well. My niece Jimmy used to recite when she was at school, and it was quite a favourite. Isn't there something in it about an angel?"

In the silence which followed her question, the second Miss Lampeter was heard saying with a small giggle to Mrs. Jennings: "*Abou* Ben Adam? But I always thought it was *About* Ben Adam. A poem, I mean, about Ben Adam."

"Oh *no*, dear. *Abou*. 'Abou' is a sort of uncle in Persian."

"Is it? How stupid I am."

The baiting of Thomas continued:

". . . Come on, Thomas!"

". . . Thomas, I'm ashamed of you. Why, you'd have finished by now if you'd begun when we asked you to."

Thomas remained planted and glowering, his face crimson, his lower lip thrust out.

Sheila had an idea. "Auntie, I believe he'd do it if I stood near him and said the first line or two *with* him, as well as the Angel bits. It would give him confidence."

Thomas was understood to say, though not using exactly those words, that it was not confidence he lacked, but the Will-to-Live.

". . . Thomas, look at *poor* Miss Picton-Porter! She's never heard *Abou Ben Adhem*, and she's simply longing to!"

Thomas slid his eyes round to Miss Picton-Porter. She

looked back at him. For a brief moment it seemed as though he and she might get together over this, rise up and declare the whole trumped-up business to be false, exaggerated and postposterous. . . .

Miss Hertha Lampeter said: "I know a little boy who's making himself quite unhappy, when he might be making quite a lot of other people happy, if he'd only try!"

This species of first aid to the drowning continued for quite a while longer, though the ladies were gradually losing hope and beginning to talk among themselves.

Unexpectedly Thomas began abruptly in a loud, toneless voice:

*"Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase),
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace——"*

With a sigh of relief, the whole party settled back to listen.

. . . *"An Angel, writing in a book of gold."*

Then he had to be prompted by Sheila: *"Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold."*

*"Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said:"*

He stopped again.

"*'What writest thou?'*" Sheila could not help supplying all the suppleness of inflection and brilliant dramatic ability that her little brother omitted.

"*'What writest thou?'*" steadily and clearly from Sheila.

"*'What writest thou?'*" crossly from Thomas. *"The Vision raised its head,*

"And with a look—with a look—with a look——"

"There! I knew he'd stick over that!" whispered Sheila confidentially to Mr. Cooper. "*Made of all sweet accord.*" He always does, you know. He says it doesn't make sense."

*"—made of all sweet accord,
Answered——"*

Sheila, with a look made-of-all-sweet-accord, spoke her line:

"'The names of those who love the Lord.'"

Thomas accepted this information stolidly.

"*And is mine one?*" he demanded, but not really interested.

*"'Nay, not so.'
'Replied the Angel,—Your turn, Thomas.'"*

*"Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still, and said 'I pray thee then,
Write me as one who loves his fellow-men.' . . .
. . . Write me as one who loves his fellow-men——"*

"Glad it isn't me," remarked Christopher, much too audibly.

" . . . Write me as one who loves his fellow-men——"

Sheila broke into silvery laughter. "It's like a broken gramophone-record, isn't it?" she remarked, still flirting with Mr. Cooper.

Thomas was getting desperate. He simply could not think of the next line, and Sheila, instead of prompting him, was just making silly jokes.

"Write me as one who loves his fellow-men——"

("He knows it quite well, really. He knew it perfectly last time. I believe they forget on purpose!")

"Write me as one who loves his fellow-men——"

Sheila came belatedly to the rescue:

*"The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again, with a great wakening light,"*

(The ordeal was nearly over now.)

. . . *"And showed the names whom love of God had
blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest."*

Thomas had always liked the last line because it was the last line.

But his afternoon was totally ruined.

Only Cousin Nellie noticed that the interlude was not too appropriate for the occasion. For still nobody made her friend feel welcome or at home; still nobody chatted pleasantly to Lou. Indeed, the silence succeeding the applause of Thomas's not too fluent account of why Ben Adhem's name had led all the rest, was, if anything, more noticeable than before.

With a touch of dignity, Lou, addressing no one in particular, remarked what a lovely garden it was, and how she loved flowers, and she would have to go in a minute, but perhaps Nellie would first show her round the rose-beds? She did not know much about gardening, but she was fond of roses: "We haven't any flowers where we live."

Christopher looked at Sheila.

CHAPTER XI

"COULD I have a word with you, madam?"

Mrs. Leigh wished that Baxter would let her have her breakfast in peace. Breakfast in bed, after all, indicated that you were not very strong, and ought not to be worried by household matters *before* 11 a.m.; and Baxter's most haw-haw voice, super-refined and spoken from an arched throat, always irritated her in the early morning. Baxter had been with them now for nearly seventeen years, and she was not so young as when she first came. In her peculiar sort of way, she was devoted to them, especially to the Colonel; yet because she was imbued with a notion that one must never betray any emotion whatever, but particularly not surprise, the Leighs felt sure that if they came to her with the information that the Colonel had been found strangled in his study, wearing a Carmen shawl and jemima boots and clasping a photograph of Mata Hari to his chilly lips, she would merely say: "Indeed, madam? Yerss, I've heard of thertt hurpenning."

"Could I have a word with you, madam?"

"Oh yes, I suppose so. Why won't Miss Sybil do instead? I'm a little tired this morning. I didn't sleep very well. So many people yesterday."

Baxter had been concealing some object in the pocket of her apron. She now silently brought it forth. It was sticky and bright reddish pink outside and white in the middle. It was, in fact, an irregularly chawed piece of Clifford's Bay rock, and the mark of a small animal's

teeth still left the words "Clifford's Bay" in pink, clear and unimpaired, although bitten through at different levels, perhaps absently, perhaps experimentally. Some of it also had been sucked instead of crunched; and here and there bits of outer covering of waxed paper still clung to it. An extremely vulgar-looking object. Mrs. Leigh shrank back among her frilly pillows.

"Why—why do you bring me this?" she demanded.

"I found it while I was doing Miss Burton's room this morning, madam. Will she be needing it again, do you think?"

Mrs. Leigh sighed in deep resignation. "I might have known. Yesterday afternoon, and now this morning." Then she gave a sharp little scream. "Don't put it down, Baxter!"

"Oh, very well, madam."

"Where did you find it?"

"I'd rather not say, madam. I think Miss Burton must have forgotten she laid it there."

Mrs. Leigh was silent.

"And it isn't only the sweetmeat, madam. There have been other things we're not used to, lately. Weed from the sea-shaw in the wash-basin. And shells that take a lot of dusting if they're to be kept clean. I mean to say, madam, it's treating one's bedroom as though it was the beach. Very messy, if you will allow me to say so, madam. I wonder, perhaps, if you would kerr to say a word to Miss Burton about it?"

Mrs. Leigh did not feel equal to the task. She went instead, directly she was dressed, to the study and told her husband what Baxter had recently told her; ending by laying before him, fastidiously wrapped in a piece of blotting-paper, the chewed piece of Clifford's Bay rock.

"Exhibit A," remarked Dr. Leigh, who, with Sybil, happened to be in the study during the recital. And he contemplated the rock with deep interest. Not so the Colonel. The Colonel frankly hated it lying on his desk.

"Really!" he exploded; got up and began to pace the room at a long, irritable swing. And then again:

"Seaweed and shells! *Really!* Is Nellie going out of her mind?"

"I thought perhaps you'd speak to her," murmured Violet Leigh, delegating the office imposed on herself by Baxter.

"I suppose I'd better, yes. This can't go on. It's—it's childish. Childish? It's worse. It's eccentric and silly and—and most inadvisable. A little more, and people will be saying that there's—well, queer blood in our family." He did not say "in your family" for fear of upsetting Violet.

"They're probably saying it already," from Sybil. "You know—or didn't you?—that two or three days ago Norah saw her paddling."

"*What?* Hell! Sorry, my dear, but *paddling?*"

Alexander turned to the window and looked out: the corners of his mouth were twitching most improperly, considering the crisis.

"Norah saw her. She has to go down to the beach sometimes, you know, because it's better not to trust her Nanny altogether, just this month. I think it's madness of Norah to let the children go on the beach at all."

Hugh flashed through Violet Leigh's mind; still, after twenty-five years. Oh, Hugh!

"Nellie was with that woman, of course. They both paddled all among the rest of the mob. Cousin Nellie had taken off her shoes and was holding up her skirt quite high. And they screamed a little when the waves

washed over their ankles."

"That settles it," the Colonel growled gloomily. "I shall have to speak to her seriously. Why didn't you tell us this last night, Sybil, when we were discussing the matter?"

"I thought Mother was too upset last night for anything more."

They had decided, then, after much perturbation, not unblended with horror at what had taken place, that as Cousin Nellie's colossal blunder had been obviously committed in ignorance, and not wilfully, and as this Miss Lou Black would inevitably soon depart, it would create less ferment, on the whole, if the family bore this trial in silence, adopting the method of the ostrich.

But now, this fresh evidence of their relation's insanity, combined with Baxter's justifiable complaints and the rumours of paddling—behaviour which all the world could witness and gossip about—

"I shall have to speak to her," repeated the Colonel. "Better get it over at once. Is she in the house? Send for her before she's off paddling again."

"What are you going to say, Father?"

Alexander wheeled round. "Yes, what *are* you going to say? Look here, sir, I don't want to butt in, but you know, she oughtn't to be lectured as though she were a naughty child. It'll hurt her feelings abominably."

"Then she oughtn't to suck that nauseating sugar-stick as if she were an idiot child. It's hurt a good deal more than my feelings."

Dr. Leigh idly picked up the Clifford's Bay rock and examined it. "Funny," he remarked, "that even if you bite it right on the slant, the legibility is not in the least impaired."

He had some thoughts of pocketing Exhibit A and presenting it to the Society, first for an exhaustive note in *The Augan*, and then to be placed in their museum. Would have done so, in fact, but for consideration of his Cousin Nellie's feelings.

"Confound it, Alec, would you mind conducting your scientific experiments on some other material?"

"Sorry, sir. I was just looking. We weren't allowed this, you remember, when we were young."

"I should think not. Good God!"

"What were you going to say, Alec?" asked Sybil reasonably.

"Only that either we shall have to forgive her for her crimes, and let 'em drop, or else she'll have to be told exactly how you all feel about it and why, so that she can realise where the jawing originates."

Dr. Leigh's father did not like this use of the word "jawing," but he admitted that there was sense in Alec's argument.

He cleared the room for action, and bade Sybil send Cousin Nellie to him forthwith.

It proved an extraordinarily difficult interview.

"Oh dear," cried Cousin Nellie, catching sight of her property lying naked on the Colonel's desk. "How did that—Cousin James, I *am* so sorry. I've no idea how it could have——"

"How it could have travelled so far," she had been about to finish gaily, but something heavy in the atmosphere of the room and the Colonel's grave expression swamped her cheerfulness from the outset. Not that Colonel Leigh was unkind. He was very kind indeed. He placed a chair for her, and enquired if she were comfortable, which was

more than he would have done for any of his subalterns on the mat. There was a long silence after she had reassured him that she was perfectly comfortable. Then, clearing his throat, his manner so stiff with embarrassment that you could have snapped it across your knee like a stick, he began the jawing.

She had not the remotest idea what he was talking about.

"Of course, we all understand that you've led a very sheltered life . . . certain things best not spoken about . . . once knew a fellow who went native . . . lost caste completely, lost his self-respect, lost everything . . . used to sit down to his dinner with a three-day stubble on his chin! . . .

". . . Of course, I know there were excellent fellows among the Germans as well as on our side, but you can't always afford to look at that. . . .

". . . Nobody can be more aware than I am of what we owe the Jews in art and finance. . . .

". . . The better class of negroes, in their own country, are a very fine race, I'm willing to believe . . . but once you let these fellows overrun you. . . . It doesn't do."

"So now you know all about it," said the Colonel, and put his hand in a fatherly manner on her shoulder. "There's no need to be distressed. No need at all. Life's life, you know, and—well, now you know all about it. We don't want you to mope about and be lonely, though. Get Sybil to trot you round to some of her committees and jamborees. She's a good girl, Sybil, and always has been. And it hasn't done her any harm to face facts. Just makes one a bit careful, that's all. There, my dear Nellie, we all want you to have a very happy home at the Cliff House. We're a devoted family, though we don't say much, and

we've all grown very fond of you, too. So that's all right, isn't it? And we needn't reopen the matter. Now, unless you want to give Brooke some extra work to do, we'll throw this into the waste-paper-basket. It's a pity to spoil those pretty teeth of yours. All your own, aren't they? Yes, I thought so. Splendid! Lucky woman! I wish that I—— Though Brooke's a sound man at his job, and never hurts you. Did a lovely filling for me the other day. He told me, by the way, that now they talk of doing their fillings with stainless steel instead of gold. I'd hardly believe it at first. Makes you think of knives and forks, doesn't it?"

* * * * *

Putting her hat on, up in her room, Nellie repeated to herself, bewildered, over and over again: "What could he have meant? What *could* he have meant? I must ask Lou, presently. Lou's so quick. I'm afraid they none of them liked her very much yesterday." Both Mrs. Bryant, the doctor's wife, and Mr. Brooke had acted quite rudely when they were introduced. Mr. Brooke's behaviour might have been absent-mindedness, of course; he was just going; but that Mrs. Bryant's intentions had been definite, there could be no doubt whatever. "Such a pity, but still, everybody can't like everybody."

She had to hurry, because they were due to meet down by the breakwater at eleven sharp. It was a lovely morning, and the tide would be just right for paddling.

Yet, after thinking it over, she decided that it might hurt Lou's feelings to refer to the matter of the Colonel's scolding; and kept quiet about it. The non-success of the tea-party did not in any way spoil the pleasures of their

friendship. The only difference it made was that they talked now, by mutual though unspoken consent, less of each other's families and their doings. There were, thank heaven, such a multitude of other things to talk about, to do and to see, every day and all the time.



CHAPTER XII

USUALLY Winifred Jevons did not go along to Gervase's room until half-past nine in the morning. Gervase was always so completely racked to bits with weariness when she came to the end of her sixteen-hour day in the service of the Esplanade Hotel, that it was difficult to get her awake before the relentless moment when her breakfast-tray was brought in to her, and she had to be made aware that in an hour her day's work would be starting again.

Winifred herself had a much easier time. She was holiday-secretary to an Aug millionaire, who occupied one of the best suites at the Esplanade, and had engaged her at a very high salary to work for him until the thirty-first of the month, when he said, vaguely, he would have to go back, and could she see her way to working for him permanently, and throwing up her regular job?

On this particular morning, even the preposterous expedients of Mr. Sam White to beguile her into accepting his offer, were forgotten by Winifred, as she hastened along the corridor, at least twenty minutes earlier than usual, towards the slit of a room which the Esplanade had just managed to squeeze aside for Gervase, at the back of the building, and overlooking nothing more beautiful nor exciting than the blank roof of the hotel laundry. For last night something had happened, and Winifred was wildly eager to hear the truth of it. Last night Goldie had been quite mad; and all the hotel staff and guests and outside visitors, were looking on, censuring her, scandalising, wondering what would be the outcome. The man-

agement had been furious. But Goldie was oblivious, caring nothing except to dance with that tall, good-looking young tripper, Reg Black. Yes, Goldie had been crazy about him from the first, but she had kept her craziness on a tether. Last night it had slipped its leash, and she neglected her pupils, neglected her duties, laughed in the face of the manager's ominous scowls, and wholly disregarded her fiancé. Over and over again she danced with Reg, while other girls sat round the ballroom forlornly unpartnered. Winifred had once tried to remonstrate with her friend, waylaying her in a sitting-out corridor gaily papered with blue fir-trees and silver fir-cones: "I say, Goldie, look here, they're all asking for a Paul Jones. Hadn't you better arrange——?"

But Gervase smiled at her radiantly, not caring to hear or understand. She would have smiled at a cab-horse in the same way, had she encountered it in the passage among the silver fir-cones. There was no Paul Jones that night. In a Paul Jones you have to keep changing your partner. Gervase did not want to change hers. She was delirious, possessed. Her thin supple young body was so vitally expressive of its surrender and ecstasy that it was almost indecent to watch her, and quite impossible to watch anyone else.

What Winifred particularly wanted to hear this morning, was whether Goldie's fiancé had said anything, or if he had just gone home. Poor old Bernie Leigh—what a facer for him! He did not look, mused Winifred, rapping hard at the door of room Number 911, as though he had any means of coping efficiently with facers.

"Oh, come along in!" Gervase cried, a great deal more wideawake than usual.

The tiny space round the bed looked as though a mob

had recently streamed through it, committing several deaths by violence on the way. Gervase was usually untidy, but when she had thrown off her clothes and got into bed at 2 a.m., she must have been in a mood of not caring whether the dawn brought glory or annihilation. Her lime-green chiffon lying in a puddle in the middle of the floor, still seemed to shake and shiver with the emotion with which it had been shot through and through, as the girl had carelessly ripped it off. She had been wearing a very showy, fantastic affair, more like a garland than a necklace, in every different hue of glittering beads, which had swung out when she danced; and this she must have broken, for the beads were spilt all over the dressing-table and the floor; there appeared to be an incredible number of them. One shoe was present and the other absent, in the muddled disarray. Gervase, however, was not in a dishevelled mood this morning. Her thousand wild follies of yesterday were now as though they had been collected into one stem and flowering of folly; taut, obstinate, brilliant, and assembled for mischief. She was sitting upright in—or rather among—her bed, and greeted Winifred with a burst of song:

“I’m in love again
And the spring is coming—

sit down, old thing!

I’m in love again
And the bees are humming—

and tell me who’s cursing me most in this rotten old pub? Not that I care a bunch of butcher-boys!

I'm in love again,
And I can't rise above it——"

"Try, just for one moment," Winifred advised severely; "it's nice, of course, to see an engaged girl so affectionately disposed towards her young man, but——"

"Engaged? Oh, you mean Bernie."

The lift dropped from Paradise, about two floors down towards earth, then buoyantly soared up again. From the subsequent babble and pæan, Winifred gathered that her lunatic companion was describing an undoubtedly attractive gentleman called Reg, who was six feet two, had a loud gay voice, red hair, a swagger in his smile, and no subtlety.

Winifred waited until the attack subsided a little; then, thinking that a touch of astringency would not be out of place, she enquired of Miss Gervase Goldacre, first, whether she thought she was going the right way about keeping her job as lady entertainer at the Esplanade? and, secondly, whether she had any intention of marrying Captain Leigh before Christmas, and being welcomed into a respectable and excellent family?

But Gervase remained sunny and invulnerable. Eloquently she demonstrated and proved beyond all possible argument that it was against her own interests to keep her job; that it would spoil her entire future to be married to a decent man of good family; and that the only wise thing for a girl of sense and soberness to do was to leave her future in a haze, and, rapt and indomitable, surrender all she had of mind or body, all prospects, caste, obligations and safety, to follow Reg Black.

And then the breakfast-tray came in.

Nearly all that day, Bernie played the piano.

The household at the Cliff House went about on tip-toe; spoke to him, when they had to, with hushed tenderness in their voices; paused outside the drawing-room door before going in, to make sure, maybe from sound, that it was still occupied by a sane mind in a sane body. Cousin Nellie and Auntie Lou were whispering about it, awed, in the shelter, and later at the Creamery; Bernie's Cousin Nellie, Reg's Auntie Lou. Nurse was nearly crying. "He's taken it so wonderful," she moaned to Baxter, who responded, with throaty impersonal sympathy: "Yerss, Nerss, it *is* a pity this has happened. I'm sure we're all upset for the captain. Young ladies should know their own minds. Yerss . . . Perhaps a sea-voyage . . . You can't ever tell."

In the study, the Colonel and Gordon, who had come down for a long week-end; in the garden, Mrs. Leigh and Sybil, clustered in appalled couples over the corpse of Bernie's engagement. That one of their family should be jilted for—So it had come to Bernie, too! For They had taken Clifford's Bay from the Leighs. For They had taken Gordon's twin. For They had taken Sybil's Nelson. Now, They had taken Bernie's love.

"Can't we *do* anything about Them?" cried Gordon, in a high, hysterical voice, walking up and down the room and biting his nails, while his father gloomed at the writing-desk: "My God, we can't sit here for ever and watch Them smash up everything any of us *ever* cares about. Can't we keep Them out, somehow? You've got influence, haven't you? I—I—poor old B-B-Bernie, he's had so little. And I've got my children to think of, haven't I? haven't I? My God, this sort of thing happening to our family, blow after blow, makes me feel that perhaps we'd

better cut right away from this place—give it all up—give up the Cliff House—give up Clifford's Bay!"

But even at a moment of ultimate catastrophe, such a solution was unthinkable. The Colonel slowly shook his head. "The boy's taking it manfully. Good thing he's got the dogs."

Alexander, after listening to the first of what might afterwards be gathered together and published under the title: "Monologues to a Spaniel," took out his car, and after a vain attempt to persuade Brooke to leave his surgery, drove alone into the next county and halfway across it. When he got back, towards nightfall, the situation had not altered very much. Bernie was playing the piano, and his family were still saying in hushed asides how marvellously he had taken it, and that Gervase was a——

"Oh, I don't know," said Alexander; "in a good many ways this young Black is better suited to her than Bernie."

"You're always hard about your brother, Alec. He's taken it splendidly."

"It's a good thing," Sybil backed up her mother, because for once they were all on Bernie's side, "it's a good thing he's got the piano."

"Ain't it?" remarked Bernie's unfeeling elder brother, going off to have a bath. And that much he meant. It *was* a good thing Bernie had the piano. He was perfectly well aware that all this posturing and self-dramatising did not in the least imply that Bernie was not genuinely going through a pretty bad time of humiliation and disappointment. To play gay, broken snatches on the piano and to confide in the spaniels, was simply Bernie's natural reaction, just as Alexander's own would have been grim shoulders and surliness and touch-me-not, and a state of extremely difficult impassivity. In circumstances of dis-

tress, he reflected, there *was* no natural behaviour. His own way was just as unnatural as Bernie's. He did feel that he deserved his mother's gentle rebuke of heartlessness. He ought to have gone up to Bernie, and at the very least said inarticulately: "Stick to it, old man," one hand laid for a moment on his younger brother's shoulder. But damn it, Gordon had already done that. Two of them couldn't. Alexander went on with his bath.

To-day Bernie had played no sad melodies; they were all lively and loud and soulless; while in the super-modern manner, so popular since the curtain to Act II of "The Vortex," his face, in contrast, remained clenched into white, set, uncompromising agony. So They had taken from him the only thing that had ever made life worth while, the only bit of luck and heaven that had ever come his way? Up till now, Bernie had not joined very deeply with his family in their bitterness against the August invaders. He had even remarked gently that of course one need not mix with Them, but two or three of Them might have been quite decent fellows if one got to know Them.

Surely such saint-like tolerance deserved a better return! But They had betrayed him, and wrenched his living heart out of his living body. Well, then don't let's show we care! On with the dance, and *vesti* with *la giubba*!

Bernie played Grieg's "Wedding March," and "Quand l'Amour Meurt" and "Rhapsody in Blue," and bits of Ravel's "Bolero," and "That's Why Darkies Were Born," and "All the King's Horses, All the King's Men."

He did not blame Gervase. The only bitter remark that any of them heard from him about her, was made to his niece: "Ah, little Sheila . . . when you're a bit older, and

want to trample on some poor devil's heart, mind you choose one without any ramparts and with only half a lung, because then you can be sure that his hell won't be light or easy."

Sheila, very flattered, but realising that a more earnest and inspired tact was needed than that which she dispensed every day, replied: "I don't think girls really admire men with red hair, Uncle Bernie. They laugh at them, usually." And she added, consolingly and in her most grown-up manner: "I expect, you know, it's just what people call a passing fancy."

Bernie's laugh mocked the supposition. Come back to a crock like himself, with his pinched ugly face, his ragged moustache, and his nose that went blue in the cold, the thinning hair on his crown—"now that she has discovered what it is to be swept off her feet by a great huge, splendid treacherous hound that comes baying down from the mountains, Lassie girl," whispered Bernie to his devoted spaniel, "with a shining tawny coat, and great breadth of chest, and all that leaping strength. What would *you* do, Jess, if that temptation were to happen to you? We mustn't put our nose down between our paws and whine. For I expect Fate knows what's best for us all in the end. But, oh, Lassie—do you remember the way she tilted her head back when she was dancing with me, and smiled mischievously and said: 'Bernie darling, why shouldn't I?' when there was something she wanted to do that she knew I wouldn't let her?"

"Going out *again*, Alec?" said the Colonel, meeting his eldest son striding towards the front door.

"The piano's stopped now," said Sheila to Christopher, "so he must be talking to Jess and Lassie."

Christopher was not deeply concerned with Bernie. What mattered so vitally to him was that the manifestations of Aug were crashing nearer and nearer to their own personal lives. Uncle Hugh had been drowned long before they were born; but first they had found the notebook; then an Aug had been brought into their very garden; and, closely linked with that was the legend that a piece of chewed Aug food had been discovered, so cook had reported, giving Baxter as her evidence, actually in Cousin Nellie's bed, under the pillow. Now, most sensational, most cataclysmic of all, Uncle Bernie's girl had thrown him over because she had fallen in love with an Aug.

"Have you seen him, Sheila? Do we know that one?"

"Yes, we do. Don't you remember, one day when he brought Cousin Nellie up home from the beach in his baby car, and we saw him helping her out? That was him. He had bright, bright red hair; and there was a boy with them, sitting in the back, and he had red hair, too, and freckles, and a scarlet sweater."

Thomas, who was sitting on the floor some way off, chalking, rather hazy as to why there was a Fuss in the house to-day, but glad that the Fuss was not in any way settling round the nursery, now said, without looking up: "I heard Father say to Nurse before we went out after lunch: 'You'll be more careful than ever, won't you, Nurse, of my three babies.'"

"What?"

For a moment Sheila and Christopher were too appalled to do more than shout just that.

"I did," said Thomas. "And one of you's taken my best piece of yellow."

Christopher recovered first from the agony of shame. "After all, Sheila," in a low voice, so that Thomas, only half in their confidence about the whole affair, could not hear, "after all, one can understand Father in a way. The Augs are winning." His eyes were enormous, not in the least frightened, but sparkling with delight that danger should be so real and so near.



CHAPTER XIII

THE concert-party, which gave two performances a day in the pier pavilion, sang an opening chorus of which the refrain was: "We are your Humble Servants," and the men wore liveries, and the girls a decorative version of maids' caps and aprons, which costumes they retained through the first half of their programme, changing into evening-dress for the second. At the end of the opening chorus, each member of the party got up and bowed, as his name was called. Aug audiences were amused by this, though Dr. Leigh, from a remark in *The Augan*, seemed to think that there was an underlying uneasiness in their amusement, as though they detected an emphasis laid too ironically on the quality of propitiation. Apparently Mrs. Black had chattered to him about it: "As though they were making fun of us," she said. One of the Lads of the Village, too—Art, to be exact—had rubbed up a back-stage acquaintance with the soubrette of the party. "Not much Humble Servant about you!" he remarked several times, good humouredly, yet with a trace of suspicion. The concert party should have chosen a more orthodox name. It would have added to their popularity. Nevertheless, their personnel was commonplace enough. It consisted of three men and three girls: the baritone, who sang Trumpeter, Sergeant, Devon and Old Brigade songs; the romantic tenor; the comic man, who did patter-dancing with the soubrette, and was awarded all the best catchy songs; the pianist, a plain girl who worked harder than any of them, and was not

noticed at all by any of the audience, who frequently said: "There's five of 'em in the troupe"; the soubrette, who did patter-dancing with the comic man; and the beauty, who obviously did not much care for her cap and apron costume, but blossomed into remarkable evening gowns later on, and sang sentimental ballads about gardens, birds, roses and love, and warbled romantic duets with the romantic tenor. On the whole: "They're good, aren't they?" said the Aug audiences, and the hall was always crowded.

Nellie and Lou frequently went to these concerts, and began to enjoy their familiarity with the programmes and the different members of the troupe, and became critical, and said: "He's not so good as usual to-night," or "Mark my words, Nellie, that girl's got a bad cold coming on. If she doesn't take care, she won't be in the programme to-morrow. I don't know what they'll do without her. She's the life and soul of the company."

The tenor was their particular favourite. "He reminds me," said Lou, in the interval, "more and more he reminds me of the tenor they used to have in a troupe just like this—things don't change much, you know—when I was a girl, over at Margate. Silly young thing, I was. One evening, I remember—he did conjuring tricks, too, my one—he walked on to the platform; there were his goldfish and hats and flags and things all ready, and he was very white in the face, and he bowed and said: 'Ladies and gentlemen, I must ask you to excuse me if I fail to please you to-night, but I'm not feeling very well,' and then—crash! Without another word he fainted, right across the floor. And, I don't know why, but it seemed to me then the most exciting and yet terrible thing that had ever happened to me, that he should faint, like that,

in front of everybody, with his white face and his fair hair all damp and curling."

Nellie was breathlessly interested in the anecdote. "Had you never seen anyone faint before?"

"No. No, I hadn't."

"That was it, then."

"Yes, I suppose that was it. But being out on the pier, though of course in a room, but still—it did make it seem, I don't know . . . I was silly."

"You were in love," laughed her friend. "You wouldn't mind as much, would you, if this one were to faint, for instance?"

"I'd be sorry, of course," said Lou, defending her natural sense of compassion; "but it wouldn't be the same."

And then Mrs. Black, who was sitting in the row just behind, came up with the genial suggestion that Miss Burton should join them on a charabanc excursion next day, which was chalked up to start at 10.30, to the Wykeleap Caves, twenty miles away in the next county. If Mr. Black went round early enough in the morning, he would be able to book seats for them all, and it would be quite a gathering of the clans. Nellie said enthusiastically that she would love to go; she had always wanted to see the Wykeleap Caves, and it was ever so much more fun to go in a large party. Flo Black agreed, and said that Reg's tooth was better, and that though she kept telling him that he must have it out, she hoped it would not be affected by a whole day in the open air to-morrow. Then she cracked a joke or two about the opportunities for adultery which would be afforded during the excursion to the dark grottoes; mentioned that they would have the lunch provided by the "Bull and Feathers" for charabanc parties, but that they were going to take their own tea

along and comfortably picnic in the woods a bit of a walk away; and waddled back to her seat, while Lou and Nellie ghoulishly settled down to await the entrance of the romantic tenor.

Lou asked: "Couldn't your nice little nephew, Christopher, join our outing to-morrow? I'm sure he and our Len would get along famously, and Len hasn't any playmates here. His sisters are ever so nice to him—always have been, since he was a baby and they minded him—but it isn't the same. My brother often wishes Len had a boy of the same age to play with."

Cousin Nellie was sure of just enough about the Leigh family's peculiarities to know that this would not be allowed for a moment. She murmured uncomfortably that Christopher was a very delicate little boy, and was unfortunately never able to leave the Cliff House garden, especially during a heat wave. But she was sure he would have loved to come.

That evening at dinner at the Cliff House, Sybil dutifully acted on her father's suggestion that she should include her Cousin Nellie rather more often in her parish amusements and activities, and thus gradually wean her away from that dreadful set absorbing her. So she asked if Cousin Nellie would care to go to a very interesting lecture that was being given at the Women's Institute the next afternoon. It was to be about Venice, which the lecturer had personally visited, and was to be illustrated with beautiful lantern slides. Sybil invariably used the adjectives "interesting" and "beautiful," on faith.

Cousin Nellie began to blush and falter. It was several minutes before the family understood that she was already engaged the next day, to go on a charabanc trip with some friends, to visit Wykeleap Caves.

An instant of silent horror. Then: "But you *can't* visit Wykeleap Caves in August!" cried Mrs. Leigh.

Cousin Nellie gathered courage from what seemed to her an absurdly exaggerated tone of outrage and recoil. "Why not?" boldly. "They're there in August, aren't they?"

The Colonel, attempting to combine authority with conciliation, said: "Now, look here, Nellie, we've lived here a long time, and——"

She interrupted him: "Have you ever seen the Wykeleap Caves?"

As a matter of strange fact, the Leighs, being residents at Clifford's Bay for some twenty years, had not, and were forced to admit it.

"There, you see! And I've been wanting to see them for the whole of this last year." She would not have been so very nearly discourteous, had she not felt that an obscure attack on Lou was concealed in their disapproval of to-morrow's delightful plan.

"I was just about to say," stiffly from Colonel Leigh, "that in—er—in a month or two, when—um—things are quieter, and—ah—it's not so hot, we might all go together, if you—er—will honour us. I know we're not very amusing people, but——"

"It's very nice of you, Cousin James," replied a now repentant Nellie, "but you see, I've promised already for to-morrow. But I'm sure I shall want to go again."

Quietly but bitterly, Violet Leigh said, directly addressing her husband: "You see, James, our offer naturally isn't very attractive to Nellie. You can't expect her to put up with us. She *likes* charabancs and mouth-organs, and a lot of people shouting all round her, and making coarse jokes and throwing paper bags and orange peel about."

"I don't see any harm——" Nellie choked on her tears,

sprang up from the table, and fled from the room.

The Leighs exchanged looks of concern, mixed with not unnatural wrath. Their Cousin Nellie was showing herself—well, not exactly ungrateful, because she was not living at the Cliff House on charity; the three hundred pounds a year Humphrey had left her, enabled her to contribute enough to make her independent. They could not stop her, but she was being headstrong and inconsiderate, and what was almost worst of all, dense—dense to all the finer shades of feeling.

“Hugh . . .” thought Mrs. Leigh.

“Nelson . . .” thought Sybil.

“Gervase . . .” thought Bernie.

“Hell!” thought the Colonel. But aloud he merely said, after a moment or two: “Getting herself mixed up in that crew! You never know. All sorts of trouble. Accidents. People saying that we’re to blame. I told her plainly enough. Dammit, I couldn’t put it any plainer than I did!”

Christopher kicked his Uncle Alec under the table. Dr. Leigh looked up, and met a long, meaning look from a pair of bright grey-green eyes that were telling him clearly that here was an opportunity in a million to serve the Society, and that if he were fool enough to let it go by—

Turning away from the urgency of his nephew’s gaze, he met Sheila’s, equally meaning, equally urgent.

“Would you feel any better about it,” Alexander obediently asked the Colonel, “if I went along to-morrow and kept an eye on her?”

His parents turned towards him gratefully. “Oh, Alec, would you really? Yes, one would feel safer. I’m afraid she’s a rather silly little thing, in lots of ways. But won’t

it be too horrid for you?"

Dr. Leigh tried not to smile. "Oh, I can bear it."

After dinner, he went up to his cousin's room, and found her trying to calm her spirits by washing her collection of Goss china, so disdained by Baxter and her duster.

"Think you can find a seat for me on your trip to-morrow, Cousin Nellie?" As children they had been taught to refer to her as Cousin Nellie, so as not to confuse her with a sister of Colonel Leigh's: Aunt Nellie, long since dead; and the old-fashioned habit had stuck. "I should like to come along if I'm not a wet-blanket."

Her face streamed sunshine and glory. She was really fond of Alec, and somehow understood his dry humour and rather formal style of conversation; and besides that, it was such balm and ointment that his greatness should so little despise her group of this summer's friends, that of his own accord he should actually want to mix with them, go pleasuring with them.

Of course and of *course* it would be perfectly easy. She could ring up the Greens at Marine View Hotel and ask them to send round word at once to the Blacks at Cottoneaster House that her cousin, Dr. Leigh, would like a seat with theirs on the charabanc to-morrow.

She was a tiny bit surprised that Alec did not suggest taking his own car, and perhaps driving her and Lou to the Wykeleap Caves, and joining up with the others there. The Lads of the Village, Les, Art and Fred, were going on their motor-bikes, taking Jimmy, Glad and Ruthie on the pillions. But still, in a way, it was jollier to be with the party on the charabanc, though not quite so grand.

"How many shall we be?" asked Alexander.

He seemed genuinely interested in the expedition. He

was a dear. "Well, let me see, there'll be Lou, I introduced you to her the other day. She's so sweet, Alec, and I'm so glad you'll have a chance to get to know her better. And Mr. and Mrs. Black; Mr. Black's her brother, but he's not *very* like her. She's quieter. And Mr. and Mrs. Green—they're of the same party, you know, and Ruthie, that's their daughter, and perhaps some of Ruthie's friends, but I never quite know, and Len and the other children, of course; Les and Art Brown are coming on their motor-bikes, and perhaps Fred Grey, too, and I'm not sure about the Black girls——"

Some obscure sense of courtesy to Bernie's brother prevented her from mentioning Reg Black . . .

"Alec, I hope—I hope you won't think them all a little bit—a little bit too rowdy. I'm afraid I'm vulgar, because I can't help enjoying the fun as much as any of them, but I know your mother and father think——"

He patted her shoulder, in his best consoling physician manner. "Poor little soul, don't you mind about Dad and Mother. There was Hugh, you know. And Bernie's engagement."

But even he did not realise that Cousin Nellie did *not* know. While somewhat sceptical of the Colonel's optimistic: "I couldn't have made myself plainer," he still thought that that much information must have got through, in the solemn interview three or four days ago.

Nellie's worst moment at the meeting-place next morning, was when she realised that Gervase had joined the party, and was already seated beside Reg in his scarlet baby car, which had a couple of Hawaiian ladies, made of peanuts, dangling at the back window. How, Nellie wondered, with a deeply-apprehensive look slanted over her shoulder

towards Alec, how had she ever managed to be released from her duties at the hotel, just now, when they were hectically busy? It did not occur to her that Gervase was in a state where she did not wait to be released from any duties at all, but simply threw them to the winds, and sped after her own wild desire. She was looking different somehow, Nellie thought, very pretty, but different from when she used to come up to the Cliff House, sometimes, during her engagement to Bernie. She was wearing an emerald *crêpe de Chine* jumper-suit, and an emerald and white-spotted scarf; bareheaded, her white beret was swinging from one hand.

"Hallo, Alec!" she called gaily, "don't say *you* are joining our jamboree! The more the merrier!"

But there was no time for Nellie to notice more than that Alec's reply was perfectly friendly and unembarrassed, before the magnificent Reg, steering his car from the vortex of charabanc, motor-bikes and lookers-on, rather resembling a meet of fox-hounds, shouted: "We're off! See you all later, if you're lucky. At any rate, Gerry and I have got the grub!" and, pursued by answering yells, banter and cries of: "Now then, behave yourselves, you two!" rattled up the hill and out of sight. The Lads of the Village were the next to go, with Glad and Jimmy and Ruthie distributed among them, all in boisterous high spirits at the prospect of their outing and another fine day of the heat wave, and intoxicated by the shattering noise of their starting-up, the fiendish bray of horns all round them, and the dashing example already set by Reg and Gerry. Cousin Nellie was indeed more than intoxicated, she was stupefied at the powerful din, as their machines roared and wheeled, practically under the very nose of the charabanc; and finally streaked, with explosions and

fierce chattering noises, out of the confined space, which had doubled and flung back the voices of the three engines suddenly released from silence.

By this time, the remainder of the party were up in their seats, in a packed mass on top of the charabanc, most of them straining over the side to buy toffee and newspapers and comics for the children.* Len was particularly clamorous for a certain coloured weekly containing the adventures of Spit, Spat and Spooter.

"How funny," thought Nellie, closely pressed up against the hot imitation-leather padding, "how funny that we should all be going out together"—herself and Alec and Gervase Goldacre and all the Blacks and all the Greens and the three lads; all one party, starting off for the Wyke-leap Caves. She had arranged for Alec to be placed beside Lou, being eager that they should get better acquainted, and also faintly anxious as to what he might think of Flo Black or of Millie Green, or of Dot and Gert, Ruthie's flapper friends, towards whom, nevertheless, Alexander looked with most un-Wimpole Street desire to know them better. He did not want to miss any of these miraculous chances for amassing data; Lou was both companionable and informative, but not in the least typical of the species. In fact, she proved as sweet and simple as his own Cousin Nellie. He meditated an article for *The Augan* in a somewhat unusual style for him: a gentle, whimsical sunset style, to the effect that "The Old Augs are Best."

He found the whole voyage to the Caves enthralling. The fresh air in movement had apparently the same

*"Aug children never seem to go to bed. They need very little sleep, and have terrific digestions." *Marginal note from Dr. Leigh's paper on the Excursion, in special "Caves" Supplement to the "The Augan."*

enlivening effect on the claustrophobic race of Augs, as flowing water. They sang; they cheered; they cracked jokes; they played mouth-organs; they flung about nougat and apple-cores, toffee-wrappings, orange-pips. They snatched the mouth-organs from each other; they beat out the Augs' Tattoo; they hailed strangers on the road with appropriate and often very funny remarks. Not witty, but funny. They ragged the conductor, they were on the best of terms with each other, and neither Nellie nor Alec were allowed for one moment to feel out of it, although they were scrupulously called Dr. Leigh and Miss Burton, where, in an equally carefree company of their own kind, they would already have passed to Christian names. He made a mental note of this.

Nobody minded: (a) warmth, (b) sweat, (c) cramping, (d) children crying.

Mr. Green's hat blew off.

Their first stop was at a pseudo-half-timbered inn, where the thirsty conductor solemnly explained that a halt would be made for them to inspect the bedroom often used by Queen Elizabeth. This was a vernacular apparently well understood by the Augs. They alighted with anticipatory cries: "Good old Liz!" "I'd like to see that, wouldn't you, Pa?" "That's the style!" "Oo, yes!" and then all of them without any pretence whatever, passed the foot of the twisting staircase pointed out to them as leading to the historical bedroom, and went into the bar. All, that is, except Cousin Nellie, who, not understanding, obediently went upstairs with Mr. Black, who had had such deep draughts of beer before they started that he could not yet manage to be thirsty again. When they reappeared they were greeted, even by strangers round the doors of the inn, with shouts of: "Now, you

two, what have *you* being doing all this time?" "Oo, that's a pretty story!" "What was good enough for Queen Liz is good enough for you." "Bet *she* found the mattress lumpy, too, in 1066."

("I suppose that was what Brooke meant," reflected Alec.)

They drove off again. Alexander had an uncanny impression, although he could not actually see any strange faces round him, that the charabanc held several more people than it had when they started. He tried counting under his breath: "Pa Black, Ma Black, Pa Green, Ma Green, Len, Dot, Gert—" How many had there been? Throughout the day he was in a perpetual state of counting up and never getting it to tally with his last reckoning. At the "Bull and Feathers," when the waitress asked: "How many lunches?" Mr. Black very competently ordered for sixteen; but when they sat down at the table, there were three lunches short. Their numbers swelled and dwindled, never remained static.

Of Jimmy and Glad, Dr. Leigh wrote in comment: "I had always supposed that, listening to the dialogue of this type of young woman, the absorbing subject would be 'Fellows.' It appears that I was wrong. They talk more about hair. In fact, it might be said of them that they are hair-minded. I overheard them at tea, one on each side of Gervase, informing her eagerly of the past history of their hair, of shampoos they had had, and shampoos they had never yet tried; of their hair when they had it parted: (a) on one side, (b) in the middle, (c) not parted at all. Of fringes. Of their hair when they had it "permed." Of water waves. Of the future possibilities of hair (a) their own, (b) other people's, finally (c) of Ma's hair.

"Aug young women are, indeed, extremely nice to their

mothers. At the souvenir barrows, their first thought was to buy 'something nice for Mum.' I have frequently noticed before to-day, that, coming round corners, you can hear them saying: 'Well, when I got home, I said to Mother, I said:—' Apparently, they have the habit of confiding in their mothers more strongly developed than among our race. They wear high heels, and though you would swear that they could not walk more than a few yards in them without tottering and feeling tired, they yet manage to walk in them for miles.

"The Flapper (Ruthie) appeared to be in evening-dress, and a royal-garden-party hat. The hat particularly impressed me in its unsuitability for the pillion of a motor-bicycle, and I asked my cousin afterwards for a description, that I might include it. She says it was fashioned of shiny crinoline straw, with a drooping brim so that the sides touched her shoulders. The dress was ankle-length, and my cousin says the material was taffeta. I observed for myself that it was pink, and worn under a much shorter tweed coat. I cannot imagine how she disposed of this suicidal costume while travelling at forty-five miles an hour behind the lad Fred on the pillion. She, also, talked incessantly about hair to the girls Gert and Dot, of whom she appeared to be the dashing leader. I should estimate her affections as being fixed on Reg. Certainly she appeared to me unduly antagonistic to Gervase, and loudly scored several points against her, which were, however applauded by no one except the lad Fred."

About a quarter of an hour further along the road from the Elizabethan inn, there came a sudden burst of rejoicing from the charabanc, on recognising the van of their party sitting at a table having drinks outside another refreshment house.

"There's our Reg!" at sight of the scarlet car. "There's our Les!" and answering repartee from Reg and the Lads of the Village, Gerry and the girls: "Pull your socks up, Higherwatha!" a favourite slogan at Clifford's Bay that year. Les, Art and Fred lurched to their feet, pretending to be very drunk, waving their glasses and clutching at the edge of the table and swaying. Pa Green and Pa Black and Len Black pushed to the back of the charabanc and leaned over, hurling oranges—"Here, catch!" almost desperate in their frenzy to establish contact even for a moment, as they rattled by. Just before the charabanc reached the caves, the car and the motor-bikes passed them, and there was another outburst of delirium. The Lads of the Village drove in tipsy zig-zags, Reg sounded the Augs' Tattoo on his horn, Len echoed it on his mouth-organ, and the girls waved scarves. Alexander looked towards Nellie to see if she were alarmed, but she was apparently inoculated by now. She was absorbed in watching the two little peanut figures at the back of Reg's car, jerking and bobbing as if in mocking delight at their escape from all primmer ways of life.

They ordered lunch at the "Bull and Feathers," but decided, against the wishes of Mr. Black and Mr. Green, to inspect the caves before eating it.

Outside the caves was a complete circle of pandemonium, inferno or paradiso, according to the way you looked at it: enormous placards boasting that these were Natural Caves, Primitive, Untouched; blaring forth the attractions of stalactites and stalagmites; vendors of every sort of souvenir on trays and barrows, objects which seemed to have no connection whatever with any sort of cave. Other charabancs perpetually drove up and unloaded, or loaded up and drove away; hundreds of motor-

bikes competed with an unending squawk and squeak of musical instruments. Everybody was eating all the time. It was almost impossible to see the actual entrance to the caves.

Dr. Leigh's impassive features gave no indication of the scientific gratification he was feeling. He had been given the Freedom of the City. He could have wished, however, that there were not a heat-wave. Still, it would be cold inside the caves.

With some difficulty their party was marshalled together, and they started off with a guide. Directly they got inside and away from the souvenirs and the sunlight, they became a little subdued by the darkness and the dampness and the sound of trickling water, a feeling of being shut in and not quite knowing where they were nor where the others were. Voices called: "Where are you, Pa?"

"'Ere, where's Len got to?"

"Ruthie! Where's our Ruthie?"

"She's behind with Fred."

"Are you sure?"

"Ooo . . . isn't it creepy?"

"Let's have some light on the subject!"

The guide, used to them, explained which were stalactites and which were stalagmites, and how in hundreds of years they would meet and form columns. The Augs, as usual, were respectful, nearly petrified at the mere mention of antiquity. The guide himself, a weary man with a white beard, was impressive to begin with. They advanced, stumbling and screaming and hushing each other, through gallery after gallery until they reached the star turn in caves, where the guide took up a rod and struck several of the faintly gleaming pillars, which rang

on different notes. Then he played the first line of "God Save the King" on them. Dr. Leigh noticed the instant response of the party, stiffly standing to attention.*

Directly the tune ceased, however, the spell was broken, and a tall Aug, not of their party, played the Aug Tattoo with his walking-stick. The last two beats were rendered by the whole crowd. Trooping out again, they found that Reg and Gervase, Les and Glad, had stayed behind in one of the earlier caves, for amorous dalliance, and did not in the least resent being ragged about goings-on in caves and the dangerous propensities of cave-men—ragging which was speckled with anecdotes of what had happened to other lovers who had done the same thing.

Len came out of the caves in scarcely breathing wonder.

"Oh, *Mum!* Now I been inside the earth! And I been right in the sea, too. And if you let me go on the swings this afternoon, I'll have been in the air as well, all in one day!"

His sister Jimmy made him a present of a rubber ball she had just bought for him at the souvenir stall; when it was squeezed, a brightly-coloured rubber chicken shot up with a squeak from its interior. Alexander watched Len's delight almost overwhelm him for a moment, as if he could not understand how such a divine impossibility could ever have been conceived and then made concrete.

"Le sage est celui qui s'étonne de tout," Dr. Leigh quoted to himself, and he looked at Len with more interest. The boy was now busy with a small Brownie camera, and the party formed itself into a large group

*"Augs are conspicuously loyal, and rejoice to be given occasion for outward manifestations of their loyalty." Cf. "Enthusiasm for Royal Family." Dr. Leigh, "Caves" Supplement, *The Augan*.

which included several strangers, before the mouth of the caves. Len took one snapshot of them and then Reg took another with Len in the foreground; and then Len photographed Reg and Gervase together, Gervase laughing, Reg with his arm tightly round her, gazing earnestly at the camera.

Lunch was laid in the big extra room built for coping with charabanc parties at the "Bull and Feathers." One long table was laid especially for their party of fourteen or sixteen or twenty-two, whatever their number might happen to be, arrested from fluidity during the actual moment of scrambling into their seats.

During the row and babble, when they were all seated waiting for food to be set before them,* Alexander noticed that Gervase was missing from her place at the far end of the table, which seemed many miles distant from the other end. At the same time there was visible among those seated at that end, a sort of ripple and heave of amusement that gradually travelled down the two sides, the whole length of the table, to where Reg sat inexplicably sundered from his girl. When the wave had spread half-way down as far as Alexander himself, and he still did not know what it was about, he felt some presence, not antagonistic, cajoling rather, that tickled his ankle. Then he, like his neighbours, lifted the cloth and looked underneath, and there was Gervase slowly making her way on all fours, greeting the rows of legs on either side as she passed them; Gervase, very solemn, very childish, very intent on this amusing means she had chosen to reach Reg, who was the

* "In Aug parlance such commodities as butter, tea, coffee, etc., are rarely spoken of 'in the piece,' but are split up into 'a coffee'—'another tea'—'four butters' and so on. Also, meals are seldom mentioned without a possessive pronoun: 'his tea', 'your dinner', 'my breakfast,' etc." Dr. Leigh, "Caves" Supplement, *The Augan*.

last to become aware of what was creeping towards him. At last, Reg himself looked, made a dive, caught a tousled, flushed and inexpressibly charming Gervase in his arms; held the culprit high for everyone to see, and shouted: "I'd like to see who's going to try and separate me and my girl again." And then he kissed her several times, and made everyone on his right side move down one, so that there was a seat vacant beside him, and everyone protested, and the babble grew louder, and the food was brought in, and there was laughter and a special toasting of Reg and Gerry.

"Queer," thought Alexander, "she's practically an Aug already, by appropriation, anyhow." Yet he found the whole incident mysteriously enchanting.

●

CHAPTER XIV

"By the way," said Brooke, next day, as he and Alexander stood waiting on the green for a foursome, ahead of them, to go through, "Gervase Goldacre brought her new young man to see me this morning."

Alexander had been watching a thin dark frieze winding between the eighth green and the sunset, where the public path writhed nearest the golf links. The silhouettes were characterised by the strange shapes of their hats, and all the apparatus of amusement which bristled against the light: walking-sticks, cameras, spades, pails and shrimp-ing-nets. Next month, the regular members of the Bay Golf Club would not have to endure this irritation whenever they reached the eighth green. Already in a week or two—he started from his reverie at Brooke's remark.

"Gervase? Brought young Black to see you? Why?"

"Toothache," explained the dental surgeon, and added with professional detachment: "A nasty molar cavity. Probably given him hell, on and off, for weeks."

"I didn't know your practice lay among the summer visitors," Alexander punctiliously enunciated the last two words.

"It doesn't, as a rule. They don't like my kind. We don't promise them painless extraction on the lamp above the door. This handsome fellow was dragged in, looking as though I were the whole Inquisition rolled into one forceps. She must have had a job to persuade him!"

Dr. Leigh enquired with interest whether the legend of painless extraction were founded on fact.

"Very rarely, and though they're a credulous race, they doubt it in their hearts, and go to any lengths of home treatment before trusting themselves even to their own choice of dentist."

"Home treatment? Mother's recipe? A little oil-of-something on a piece of cotton-wool?"

Brooke gave him laconic description of a patent stopping cement, which could be bought at the chemist's. "You scrape the inside of the hollow tooth a bit, and squeeze in the cement, pressing it down with your thumb. It hardens, and there you are!"

"Is that what Reg Black had been doing?"

"No; as a matter of fact, Reg Black was virgin, professionally speaking, till he came to me."

"Did you take out his tooth?"

"Didn't have to. I jabbed in a mandibular injection and then stopped it. He was entranced when he found it was all over and he hadn't felt anything. The lion and Androcles! Now, when I get thrown into the arena, he won't eat me."

"Lucky for you, as his teeth are so good."

"Yes, he's a fine-looking specimen of a fool."

Alexander looked thoughtfully towards Bernie and Mr. Jennings, the former drooping a little as he approached the seventh green. His mother had suggested that a good game might cheer him up and take his mind off what had happened. "Poor Bernie!" he remarked, and Brooke grinned, realising that the comment was not irrelevant.

"He's well out of it!"

"Think so?"

"She couldn't have meant to stick to him, even when she accepted him. He's not her type. She wants something cruder and more tuppence-coloured."

Alexander thoughtfully swung his putter for a moment or two. "That's all very well, but what's going to happen to her next, when the season's over?"

"She'll get another job, I suppose, and forget about him."

"They won't take her back at the Esplanade next year; fed up with her. She was conscientious enough about carrying on with the entertainment business while she was engaged to Bernie; in fact, she made it an excuse not to see too much of him, but since this Black youngster has butted in, she's off her head; out with him morning, noon and night. Doesn't care a damn who entertains at the hotel and who doesn't."

Rumours were vibrating from end to end of Clifford's Bay, from the pier to the beach, and from the beach up to the Golf Club, and even as far as the Residents' enclosures, of Gervase's lunatic behaviour since touched by the finger of infatuation. It was unthinkable that the visitors at the Esplanade should be left unentertained; but in vain did Mr. Walcot, the manager, expostulate with the young lady hired to entertain them. She barely listened. It was as though a pavement-artist on earth were trying to outline with one of his crayons the flashing quivering stars that danced in the sky. He could have sacked her, but it was hardly worth while, so near the end of the season, to get somebody else; so optimistically he hoped from day to day that this strange mania might pass, and leave her the same bright, helpful, resourceful girl who, before the coming of Reg Black, had run up to old ladies and said: "But of course you must take part in the Gymkhana! I'm not going to let you off, and we've got such lovely prizes!"

Meanwhile, his wife, a large solemn woman, had to undertake the entertaining job, and did it as best she could,

but without contributing very much yeast to the lump. He told Gervase that she would lose her end-of-the-season bonus, and Gervase laughed.

"She intends to marry him," said Alexander abruptly.

Brooke remained silent for a moment. Then he said: "She can't. What's the good? He's all right for a week, or two weeks at the most. Let her sleep with him, but—marry him? What's the *good*?"

"She says she'll go back with him wherever it is. She's as bad as that."

"Seriously?"

"If you can use that word about Gervase Goldacre—yes, seriously. Her blood's dancing a jig. She can hear the jig and nothing else, for the moment."

"Bernie and Jennings are taking their time. Old Jennings keeps slicing."

The sun had dipped by now, and a pale amber glow behind the figures filing along the path about a hundred yards from where they stood, outlined the silhouettes into clearer shape, as though they had been cut out flatly from black paper and then animated into absurd life. A child running, dropped its tin pail with a clatter, fell down, roared, was picked up and shaken by its mother. Two or three figures linked arms and broke into a sentimental chorus—one of the popular hits made by the "Humble Servants" that month. A boon companion made a joke, and had his face slapped, and a shout of laughter applauded this treatment. The child who was being shaken still roared, and was given a sweet. Two boys, one of them running along backwards, were throwing a ball; a pair of lovers suddenly broke apart, the girl running, the chap pursuing, with cries of: "Here! I didn't mean it! You take things all wrong! D'n-be-s' touchy! You'll be

sorry Friday, when I'm gone!"—"Oh, *yew!* Pull your socks up, Hiawatha!"

Cousin Nellie was not so brightly chattering as usual, as she sat that afternoon with her friend Lou in one of the sheltered seats on the pier. This time the shelter was not needed against rain, but against the strong summer sun beating down on the boards and metal, bringing out the smell usually dormant in them. They were very lucky to have been able to find these seats, but the pier was already less crowded than it had been a week ago; and Lou, although she was so soon leaving herself, was innocently sorry for the people whose holidays were already over, or would be over within the next few days.

"I like to see it crowded, and everyone enjoying themselves," she said. "It seems sad, doesn't it, in a way, when you can get such nice seats as easily as this, though of course it's more convenient. And this time I think it's been better even than it always is. For me, of course, because we've been about so much together. But for the others, too. Look at yesterday!"

Cousin Nellie *was* looking at yesterday. That was why she was so silent. And Lou Black chatted on:

"A perfect outing, wasn't it, from beginning to end? No one upset and no one hurt—well, of course, there *was* Les on the way home——"

One of the Lads had had a slight mishap on his motor-bicycle, which, avoiding a charabanc, had swerved into a cottage garden, ploughed up the beds, broken a window and knocked down an aged man. But the old codger was not, as you might say, hurt, though probably by the end of that week he would be feeling a slight nervous reaction.

"Glad was a bit worried about Les, what with the bits

of glass and the lawn-mower and all, but he wouldn't let her look then; said, bless him, that he hadn't got a scratch on him; and he was as perky as anything all the evening."

"They didn't go out *again*, did they, last night after we all got home?" Even though Cousin Nellie was getting used to the toughness and resilience of her new friends, she was surprised at this; for the strenuous excursion to the Wykeleap Caves, enjoyable though it was, had left her wholly tired out and not wanting her supper.

"Good gracious, yes! You don't suppose that the young folk are going to waste an evening of their holidays when there are so few left! My dear, I hope it wasn't too much for you? You are a little pale this morning. I saw it at once. I said to myself: 'Nellie's looking pale this morning.'"

"I can't tell her," thought Miss Nellie Burton, "because, after all, it's her own brother. If it had been Mr. Green——"

Though even then, she was not sure if she could have had the boldness to confide even in Lou what was bothering her. For gradually, on the way home in the charabanc, she had become more and more conscious of Mr. Black beside her, paying her attention; and not just gallant attention of banter and compliments which, laughing a little, she could have attributed to the spirit of the occasion and not to any particular fancy for herself, but—well—Nellie blushed and shrank a little in remembrance—certainly the charabanc was crowded; it seemed, indeed, more crowded returning than on the way out, and they had had to sit three on a seat meant for two. It was therefore quite natural, wasn't it, for Mr. Black, sitting next to Nellie, to put his arm round the back of the seat to pre-

vent himself from falling off? Then the arm appeared round Nellie, and that, too, might have been natural, always supposing that Mr. Black had not noticed it himself. But you could not go on believing *that* for long, because the arm began to squeeze at intervals, and to say "Comfy?" in a whisper—no, not the arm, but Mr. Black. It squeezed and it nudged and it tickled and it right-down cuddled with every lurch of the vehicle, till——

No, there was no doubt about it at all, Mr. Black had been really making love to her on the way home!

Then was he *in* love with her?

And if so, what would happen next? Would he—follow it up? And how?

A sudden gasp from Nellie, and——

"What is it, dear?" from unsuspecting Lou.

But Nellie had just imagined Mrs. Black going to Colonel Leigh and saying: "Your wicked cousin has taken my husband from me and our children!"

She longed to find out from Lou whether Mr. Black were in the habit of making his wife unhappy by these Don-Juan-like affairs, or whether she, Nellie, had been too much for his faithfulness; and luckily, just at that moment, Lou's narrative of a last year's picnic at Clifford's Bay had brought her to a mention of her brother in combat with a wasp's nest, so that it did not sound too irrelevant for Nellie to ask casually: "Your brother is so resourceful, isn't he? I suppose Mrs. Black would be quite lost without him?"

"Oh *yes!*" heartily, "and, of course, she has to see very little of him, except when they're on holidays like this. But still, at home there are always the evenings and the week-ends and Christmas and Easter. We sometimes

come down here for Easter. Oh yes, they're quite Darby and Joan."

"Do you mean he never——? Men sometimes——" faltered Nellie.

Lou laughed at the mere idea that Mr. Black could belong to the genus of Men-Who-Sometimes, and not only Mr. Black, but Mr. Green, too, and probably Mr. Grey, Fred's father, and Mr. Brown, the father of the Brown lads. They might have a bit of fun, Lou conceded, but it would never be anything more than that. It never had been, and it never would be. They would be inexpressibly shocked at the very thought of it!

Cousin Nellie's feelings ran up and down a curious scale during the last few minutes: relief foremost, that she had nothing to fear from betrayed wives, and man as a raging tiger; shame at herself for having been such a goose as to suppose that Mr. Black had "meant anything"; pleasure again to find that her friends were such nice people, that they loved their wives, and could impart wholesome gaiety to a day's excursion without ceasing to love their wives; and, finally, a minor interval in the scale, faint disappointment, because she had, there was no denying it—she *had* quite enjoyed the little escapade.

"Hal-lol!" cried Auntie Lou, hailing Reg and Gervase.

"Hallo-allo-allo!" responded Reg, saluting.*

"Well, Reg, how was it? Did he take it out? My poor

* Under the heading "Aug Gestures" Dr. Leigh remarks that the salute is a favourite among Aug young men, and is looked on as witty, military and debonair. Dr. Leigh had the intention of devoting a complete section of one issue of *The Augan* to the subject of "Aug Gestures." Under this heading he placed the note on "Saluting" given above, and also the following memorandum: "They have special ways of smoking cigarettes, holding them the wrong way round in their hands, and putting them in their mouths with the hand and elbow held in front of the face. Their ability to retain a cigarette on the lower lip with the mouth wide open is very remarkable."

boy, did he hurt you? You're looking splendid, isn't he, Nellie?"

And Reg was feeling splendid, too. No more tooth-ache, ever! You didn't *have* to have tooth-ache, not much you didn't! and you didn't have to have your tooth out, either. Not much you didn't! Not while there were swell fellows about like Amyas Brooke. Rum name, Amyas, but, by heck! he knew his job all right!

It was plain that Reg had not yet recovered from astonishment at Brooke's delicate treatment. Reg was no coward, but like Les and Fred and Art and Len, he was prepared to endure nights and days of agony from an aching tooth, weeks and months of intermittent torment, rather than face that sinister chair which dropped your head back so suddenly, as suddenly as though you were being hanged for murder!

But Gervase had refused to sympathise with the desire to postpone a visit to the dentist. Under her coaxing she had been masterful, and had walked him off to the young dental surgeon, Bernie's and Alec's friend, whom the residents of Clifford's Bay swore was as good as Harley Street. Reg, mistrustful, childish, his soul whimpering, had suffered her to do this to him. Now she radiantly invited Auntie Lou and Cousin Nellie to join her in teasing him over his apprehensions. She quoted the old tag: "The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be. The devil was well, the devil a monk was he!" and Reg retorted that there wasn't much monk about him, well or ill, when his Gerry was anywhere about—kissing her—not much there wasn't! Monks! What they wanted, stuck away in their cloisters, was——

Gervase laughed mischievously, seeing he had rather shocked the two dear little ladies. In fact, Auntie Lou

slapped him, and he kissed her, too, *and* Miss Burton, and offered to kiss Ruthie who went flaunting by at that moment, arm-in-arm with Dot and Gert, but Ruthie tossed her head and laughed a shade too loudly, threw Gervase a look of sharp dislike, and called back over one shoulder that she'd had enough of Reg's kisses last summer, thanks very much, and they were just as stale as old buns!

"Don't look at me in that tone of voice!" Reg remarked lightly; but his aunt, who seemed a little uncomfortable, changed the conversation by asking Gervase if she were going to join them at the concert that evening?

"Of course I am! I wouldn't miss Saturday night!"

"They give such amusing souvenirs, don't they?" Auntie Lou assented cosily.

Cousin Nellie asked, innocently enough: "Then aren't you working at the hotel any more, my dear?"

"Supposed to be," laughed impenitent Gervase, "but they must have forgotten the colour of my hair by now." And she swung with confidence towards Reg, expecting him to join her amusement. But Reg said in a troubled way: "Look here, darling, of course I simply hate not having you with me every moment, but are you quite sure—I mean, do you think that it's altogether cricket? It's Gala night up at the old Esplanade, isn't it? It would be different if you'd given them the chuck altogether, but——"

"Well, I will, then!"

"Yes—but, letting them down at the last moment—Old Alf was up there for the Flannel Dance on Tuesday, and he said it was as dull as old boots. Don't you think perhaps you'd better go there to-night? After all, *I* went to the dentist!"

Gervase frowned, and Cousin Nellie nearly demolished

Reg's argument by saying gently that perhaps Mr. Black was right, and that perhaps it might be more kind and fair, even though, of course, it must be terribly hard to give up an evening's pleasure, when one is only just engaged—And then she stopped, remembering not so very long ago, when Gervase had been only just engaged to her nephew Bernie. And Auntie Lou strengthened her nephew's case, after the way of all aunts, by disagreeing with him, and saying that one is only young once, and summer holidays only happened once a year, and Saturday was only once a week, and she was quite sure that Mrs. Walcot, if asked nicely, would manage, and—

And Gervase impulsively saw herself as a cad and a slacker, and promised Reg she would atone for all her sins of the past week by being an angel of entertainment at the Esplanade gala night, so that the tale of it would for many years hold children from their play and old men from the chimney-corner.

"That's the stuff!" Reg cried warmly. "Look here, I'll chuck the concert, shall I, and buzz round to the 'hottle' instead?"

Her sudden smile at him was so dazzling that Cousin Nellie, she did not know why, felt like blinking her eyes. Why, this girl was in *love*; madly, recklessly in love!

"No, don't do that! Much good I'd be to anyone else while you were anywhere around! Stay away the whole evening, and I'll be good!"

"Righto! Then what about a spot of tea toot sweet—and the tooter the sweeter?"

They all four went to the end of the pier, where you could get tea on a tray and take it to any seat or shelter you liked, if you left a deposit of two shillings.

Sapphy knew she had no right to leave the pier on a Saturday afternoon of all times, even though she had arranged with Muriel, one of the girls from the Clifford's-Bay-Rock-and-fishing-bait stall to take her place while she was away. Muriel enjoyed doing this, because the studio and its costumes had for her a flavour of *The Stage*, although Cromwell Dripp did not care for the arrangement. But Sapphy had not seen Sheila for several days, and she persuaded herself that the piece of information she had to deliver for *The Augan* was vital and could not wait. After all, the Society was more important than just ordinary business; the Society might be one day a benefit to humanity, so Christopher Gordon Leigh had boasted, and Sapphy had had all her natural tendency to shrewd, incredulous argument knocked out of her at one blow by the delivery of Dr. Alexander Gordon Leigh's name and corroboration. If Sheila's uncle had *said* they were a different race with peculiar properties menacing Clifford's Bay, and queer-like, and Sheila believed it, then it was true, and she, Sapphy, would faithfully accept the important job she had been given to report on anything that struck her about their goings-on, and God knows she was getting proofs of it all day long. It struck her that this was a not unworthy joke for a photographer's daughter—"getting *proofs* of it." She would save it up for Sheila. Might make her laugh. Unluckily, though, it was much more likely to make Christopher laugh, and Christopher was nobody compared with Sheila. By dashing up to the East Cliff and hanging about in the road under the steep hedge that bordered the front garden, perhaps she could attract the attention of one of the members of the Society going in or out; if it were not Sheila herself, they would tell Sheila, and presently Sheila

would come lightly running out, with her fascinating smile of welcome wrinkling the bridge of her nose, and her quick, pretty, excited voice saying: "Hallo, I'm so glad it's you! I say, have you got anything new? Anything good? Quick! Nobody'll see us if we shelter here!"

She did not have to wait for long before she saw Thomas and Nurse and the Arundels' nurse and several Arundel children and a pram, coming down the hill of Merton Road on their way home from a walk. Thomas saw Sapphy, and lingered behind.

"Hallo. Where's Sheila?"

"Sheila?"

"Yes—Sheila." He needn't behave daft, just because someone had been and gone and asked him where his sister was.

"Did you want her?"

"Shouldn't be asking if I didn't, should I?"

"I mean, shall I give her a message?"

"No," said Sapphy briefly.

"She went to-day to stay with Rosemary Chaplayne for the week-end. But they're up there," nodding in the direction of the East Cliff. Then, as Sapphy started off without further unnecessary conversation, Thomas added: "They're riding."

This was a check, Sapphy did not know why, except that riding was associated with grandeur. Before aeroplanes were so popular, a favourite Dripp back-cloth with the Augs had been a spirited horse leaping a hedge. You wore the same top hat as for cab-array, and it was difficult to keep it on your head, poked through the hole, but the photo looked fine, sometimes. Yes, riding was a haughty affair. And she had a swift vision of Sheila in a cab-array top hat, but on a real horse, leaping a hedge upon the East

Cliff. The horse would run away, and she, Sapphy, would race after it, and catching it skilfully by the bridle-rein, at great peril to herself, save Sheila's life.

From half-way up The Bushery, Nurse called Thomas. She could not think why he was lingering behind.

Sheila had taken riding as an extra at school for the last two terms. Her grandmother had insisted on it, because it was so important for a girl if she went out to the East; moreover, Mrs. Leigh had paid for it herself and said it was a Christmas present, so as not to hurt her son Gordon's feelings. For naturally Gordon would himself have liked to give his children the best of everything and every advantage. But the poor boy earned very little at his profession. It was just bad luck; Gordon and Bernie were the unlucky ones of the family. Alec was lucky.

It did not occur to Mrs. Leigh that Gordon was not unlucky, but fairly incompetent; a barrister needs to be something more than industrious and honest to receive very many briefs. At all events, since the death of his wife who had "managed" marvellously, Gordon had not been in a position to provide a comfortable, separate home for his children.

It had been the best of surprises for Sheila when Rosemary Chaplayne's note had been brought round by the Chaplayne chauffeur that morning, asking her to come up to White Towers and spend the week-end. The Chaplaynes had not come down last year. They had gone to their villa at Cannes instead, for they possessed that delightful amount of riches which meant that even though they owned a house, they need not live in it. They had built White Towers, two miles from Clifford's Bay, along the East Cliff; built it complete with stables and tennis-

courts and a way down to a private bathing-beach; and since then they had only occupied it about twice, and each time only for six or seven weeks. The year before last, Rosemary, who was a year older than Sheila, had had several of her own friends staying with her. Sheila had been invited two or three times, and had met with some respect from her young hostess, owing to her charm and her tennis; but this year Rosemary had no one else staying with her, and had already proposed that they should ride together every day, that Sheila should coach her in back-hand returns, and that she should teach Sheila how to drive the small Lea-Francis. All this, coming suddenly, was heaven and a fairy-tale rolled into one. Sheila was not wholly a snob, but it happened that by instinct and choice, Rosemary's was the sort of life that suited her best. She had no embarrassments when brought into contact with butlers, grooms, private shower-baths and other unaccustomed luxuries. Nor did she worry about her clothes being wrong, into a tear-bedewed diary. As it happened, they were not, but Sheila, had necessity arisen, could have made them right simply by wearing them. Mrs. Leigh had been sensible to have had her taught riding as a provision for the future; even if she did not marry somebody whose regiment was ordered East, there would always still be county families and the hunting set, for such as Sheila.

The two girls were walking their horses after a good gallop over the soft turf, the groom riding fifty yards behind. Rosemary was telling Sheila about their speed-boat on the Mediterranean; and there was a delicious suggestion that some time next year Sheila should be invited down to stay with them. She could play in the tennis tournaments and win glory for the Château Clair de Lune:

"They won't let us in at the Casino, of course, until we're of age, but by far the best parties happen at our own place, round the swimming-pool. Mummy's had a cocktail-bar and a buffet built down there, so that one needn't go all the way up the steps to the terrace for one's lunch, but just flop round in bathing-dresses. We're having the mattresses covered in orange for next summer. They're pink now."

Sheila, strangely, did not think: "Augs' colours!" She thought: "How wonderful to lie in a bathing-dress in the sun beside a swimming-pool, with a buffet built in, so that you needn't run all the way up the steps to the terrace!"

And at that moment Sapphy called: "Coo-ee!" and dashed across from the cliff path to Sheila's side. "Ooo, I've got *such* a stitch in me side!" she gasped. "I've been running and running and looking and looking. Thought I'd never find you. What a way you've come." She chattered on, feeling a little nervous, partly of the unaccustomed splendour of the *cortège*, partly of some quality of aloofness in Sheila herself, and partly because she was not used to horses, and one never knew. "Is the gee all right? Whoa there!"

"He won't hurt you, Sapphy," Sheila explained kindly, but very conscious of Rosemary's quizzical contemplation. "Were you out for a walk?"

"Me? A walk? And on a Saturday afternoon? That's a good one. No, I came up to find you. Look here, there's a bit I think you ought to know." Sapphy looked towards Rosemary; and then, emphasising her privileged position as one of the initiate, dropped her voice, winked, and nodded sideways: "We better move away a bit. She's not a member, is she?"

Rosemary smiled, and trotted her horse back towards

the groom. Sheila looked after her; then again at Sapphy, who was wearing her usual not over-clean black satin dress, with plenty of beads and ear-rings and bracelets. She also had on a red velours hat. Sheila's hands tightened a little on the reins, and her delicate brows quivered; she was not enjoying this mix-up of her last phase of interest with her present one, though neither justice nor manners would suffer her to show it:

"Well, Sapphy, what is it?" She bent down from her horse to listen. Sapphy, by this time, was furiously uneasy. All was not well, she knew that; nor was this anything like the atmosphere, that rich, shadowed, cosy atmosphere under the hedge by the front garden in Merton Road, among the pungent but not unpleasant smell of dust and damp and mature green leaves. . . . Heaven and a fairy-tale in one, to Sapphy Dripp!

She repeated her Aug anecdote, fumbling over the point. It sounded hopelessly bald and flat, with everything left out that had made it seem worth while as an offering to *The Augan* and to Sheila. Sheila wondered why on earth Sapphy had come up all this way, only to tell her that; and Sapphy, miserably, wondered the same thing.

After she had finished, there was a pause, while the world sank into a morass of disappointment.

"Well, thank you. I'll tell Uncle Alec. I ought to be going now. I'm keeping the others waiting," said Sheila.

Sapphy stood back. "I'm sorry," in a voice all twisted up with jealousy.

"It's all right. There's nothing to be sorry about." Sheila was unwilling to let the other girl go without somehow relieving her embarrassment. Yet she could not quite recover her annoyance at the inopportune apparition. "I hope business is good," she said at last, and Sapphy

immediately took this for an insult.

"Much you care!" and flounced off, without saying good-bye.

Rosemary rejoined her friend. "What an odd little object. Who was she? What did she want?"

Sheila was silent.

"And what was all that stuff about my not being a member? A member of what? She didn't," laughed Rosemary, "look much like the secretary of your local Golf Club."

Sheila decided that it would be better to tell Rosemary about the Society, giving it its full name, its full importance, and the full weight of Dr. Alexander Leigh's support, and thus account for Sapphy more or less plausibly, than to let Rosemary suppose Sapphy was the sort of friend that Sheila knocked about with in her spare time, for no reason whatsoever. She made out a better tale than poor Sapphy had done under similar conditions a few moments before; but all the same, she felt unhappily that she had failed to attract Rosemary's interest in any vital way. Rosemary was, indeed, attentive, but remained outside the ring of thrill or enchantment.

Actually the Chaplayne girl was a little dismayed. She had thought Sheila Leigh desirable in every way, until this nonsense started up. She did not mind the awkward interlude of Sapphy's appearance. That could be avoided in future; and, anyhow, these things were always happening. But she did mind that Sheila, who had apparently a clear and lucid mentality, excellent poise, and a rippling sense of humour—every requirement, as well as her tennis—should be capable of lapsing into babyish foolery about secret societies and a flying race with wings or whatever it was. It had better be mocked out of Sheila's

system as crisply as possible.

"Sheila—*darling*—you're joking, aren't you? I mean—you can't believe—you can't possibly—that there are really such things as Augs? They're just holiday crowds. They don't matter one bit. I mean, they never come near us at White Towers."

Sheila did not reply. She was looking down at the neck of her horse. Her clear, small profile was hard and slightly disdainful. Rosemary could not tell for whom or for what the disdain was intended. So she went on, at random: "Because why should the trippers at Clifford's Bay be different from the trippers anywhere else? I simply can't imagine what you all collected to put in this magazine of yours? Trippers are trippers. They're not lurid or mysterious. They make a lot of row, but one doesn't see them. One just takes them for granted. And if you catch them trespassing or anything of that sort, they're quite meek about it. Honestly, Sheila, you *must* give up all this stuff about there being wild, sinister reasons for their liking cream and old ruins. People would laugh. Trippers only like them because they don't get enough of them all the rest of the year."

"That's just it," from Sheila, in a low voice, and still steadily scrutinising her horse's neck and the laws of self-preservation.

"Well, but— isn't it rather like savages to believe that anybody who isn't exactly like ourselves is mysterious or dangerous or has a devil in them? Savages feel like that about machinery, I believe. Or at least," she added lightly, "if it isn't like savages, it's like uneducated people."

"You can't call Uncle Alec an uneducated person!" Sheila flared.

"Darling, naturally not. Everybody knows about Dr.

Leigh. He's one of the greatest specialists of our time in his own line. He's splendid. But of *course*”—Rosemary spoke from full conviction—“of course he was pulling your leg over all this business, just as my uncles are always pulling my leg. It amuses him, I expect. When he sees that you're wise to it all, he'll stop. I do understand, though; it's because you've been kept at home too much. It's quite a good game for your little brothers, but you——”

“Let's gallop again,” said Sheila, pressing the chestnut's flank.

Rosemary could not complain of any more babyish nonsense from Sheila, either during the rest of that week-end or at any other time. Sheila Leigh was the perfect friend she had looked for at Clifford's Bay. And it would be lovely to have her down at Château Clair de Lune in the south! Neither of them mentioned the subject of Augs again.

CHAPTER XV

SAPPHY always wished that theirs was not a trade that had its biggest boom on Sundays, when nobody else had to work at all. It seemed hard; it seemed unnatural. Just never no fun at all for a girl, thought Sapphy, disconsolately walking down the pier with her father; and it was going to be hotter than ever to-day; already, at nine o'clock, the day smelled airless, and the sea lay like wrinkled oil-cloth, whitish-blue. Yet last night she had heard it blowing up a bit rough, and had hoped the heat-wave had broken.

"Not for three or four days yet, if I know anything about it," remarked the photographer, briskly inserting his key into the door. He turned straight through the archway into the studio on his right, leaving Sapphy occupied with some matter at the counter. Suddenly she heard a sort of gargling sound from her father, and without lifting her head from the orders she was sorting, she called out sharply: "What is it, Dad?"

Getting no answer, she looked round. Cromwell Dripp was swaying on his legs, pawing the air for support. Frightened, she ran towards him.

It was only from the other side of the archway that she saw the head of a dead man lolling through the hole in their back-cloth; the head looked disproportionately large above the painted body of a cupid in flight. His hands were through the holes, too, and seemed rather a tight fit. Perhaps they had swollen. At all events, they hung even more limply than the head, which still appeared to

have a touch of waggish life.

"It's one of Them!" ripped through her mind.

Then: "It's all right, Dad," cried Sapphy. She assisted him to a chair. As for that poor chap, you couldn't do any more for him; better look after Dad, who'd gone a nasty colour.

"It wasn't there last night," Cromwell Dripp reiterated feebly, fighting the glass of water that Sapphy brought him. "I could swear it wasn't! I'd have seen if it was. Who—who could have put it there?"

"Dunno. That's for the police to find out. Look here, I'd better go for 'em, hadn't I, now you're better?"

Cromwell Dripp shook his head. What, and leave him alone with that thing? No. No, he'd come along to the police.

"One of us ought to stay here. Look, I'll stay. You go, and mind you don't say anything to anyone going along. We don't want to get into trouble with a lot of busy-bodies swarming in and poking about before the police get a chance." She added, with professional wisdom: "They'll want to take pho——"

She jerked to a sudden halt, remembering that the evening before, their final appointment had been for the Two Heads with Crab, and she had left that back-cloth hanging. Someone, then, had been monkeying about with the rollers. Someone must have broken in—Well, of course; chaps didn't murder themselves. Chaps didn't put themselves through a hole on a cupid and then die there. Not in an empty studio they didn't, after ten o'clock at night, and no blood anywhere. A queer little thrill licked up Sapphy's spine. She did not want to consult her father; she wanted to be alone, to snoop round and find clues—yes, even to look behind the back-cloth. There was

a short space between the edge of the roller and the floor, and there Sapphy's gaze, dropping fascinated, saw a pair of "ox-blood" brogues, rather dusty. "Matches 'is 'air," she thought, marvelling at her own coolness and observation. She became aware of her father muttering and rambling.

"They done it against me! It's a plot. Stuck it up there to frighten me, that's what they done. I won't 'ave it. I'll 'ave the law on 'em. Stuck it up there to ruin me! Who's to come to the studio now, when there's been a body—? We shall 'ave to burn the cupids, and they were the most popular of the lot. I never ought to 'ave 'ad 'em, naked creatures! Now we're ruined. I'll 'ave the Law on whoever did it!"

"Go along, then," Sapphy advised, "and 'ave the law on 'em, instead of sitting there talking. Just you go along as quick as ever you can and keep your mouth shut on the way."

With a few more encouraging shoves and adjurations she got Cromwell out of the room and on the pier. There were a few people about by now. She watched him rushing along at a good pace, though his legs were not under perfect control. Someone called facetiously after him: "Forgotten yer spade and pail?"

Dripp glared, shook his head, and disappeared behind a bulge of piled-up chairs. A distant voice cried faintly: "Pull your socks up, Hiawatha!"

Sapphy returned to the studio.

With a queer, intent look of purpose on her wizened little face, she passed straight through to the dark room and carefully put on a pair of rubber gloves. While she was doing this, she was thinking, not of the dead body, nor of her father, nor even of the unknown murderer. She was thinking of Sheila Leigh, angrily, with a tumbled-

over feeling in the pit of her stomach which her favourite penny stories would describe as a "sore heart." In spite of yesterday, she continued to admire Sheila furiously, intensely, and to refuse to give up the idea that their secret society was still an active, living thing. And she meant to impress her President by bringing off a tremendous coup, a coup well matured, coldly and brilliantly developed, and dramatically disclosed.

So here was the coup, and by a stroke of luck she was from the very beginning in full command of the situation: nor did her nerves betray her. She didn't mind the dead body—she didn't *mind* it, not—one—little—bit—she—didn't.

With her rubber gloves on, Sapphy went boldly to the other side of the cupid back-cloth.

It was so fantastically obvious that she should find a knife stuck between the dead man's ribs, that she could hardly believe it when she actually saw it there. She recognised the knife. It was one of their own properties: a large, clumsy-looking weapon that went with the cowboy costume. There was very little blood. A parson's hat and a tambourine were lying on the floor, giving an effect of having been very carefully chosen from the Dripp collection of properties to go with the cowboy's knife and the cupid back-cloth. Sapphy picked them up and scrutinised them, knitting her brows sternly. Neither of them told her anything. She put them back carefully in exactly the same positions on the floor. She came round to the front of the back-cloth again, took another look at the face. Yes, it was one of Them, right enough, and, moreover, though the features had been grotesquely pulled awry by death, she yet believed that she had seen him before. It was more than probable that he had been one

of their clients. Right! Then the next thing to be done, in the interests of the Society, was to identify him. Sapphy walked proudly and stiffly across the studio to where the pile of albums and ledgers were kept behind the counter.

And suddenly she caught sight of the broken window; had there been a wind, she might have noticed it before. And as suddenly she began to cry, a miserable, nervous, blubbering affair of gasps and sniffs. It wasn't that a broken window, that you saw nearly every day somewhere or other, was more horrible than a corpse stuck through a bit of scenery, which you saw very rarely. It was that—somehow, someone—somebody alive must have smashed that window, their studio window—Dripp's Photographic Studio—smashed it so as to get in, smashed it on purpose, and once inside had been and done a murder, or been murdered. Two of them, then. And with *their* cowboy knife, while nobody knew, not she nor Dad nor anybody, because you might think, mightn't you, that a place was safe and all right when you'd fastened the windows and locked the door, and there were lots of people about outside? And then to come in and find this!

Beyond the broken window someone passed outside; someone asked: "Hot enough for you?" someone laughed; someone called: "Wait for me, Flo! I'll be with you in two twos!"

Footsteps met and paused:

"'Allo, Andy! How's Andy?"

"Oh, very 'andy. How's Ernie?"

"Oh, can't grumble. . . ."

The footsteps moved away together over the boards. Someone clattered a fishing-rod. The sea lapped suavely

round the supports of the pier. Someone ejaculated: "Crikey! it's going to be a blazer to-day!"

Still crying, unable to stop herself now, Sapphy methodically lifted down one album after another. Her legs had as much strength as a pair of jellies, but she wasn't going to let *that* stop her. What would the President say if she let that stop her? Presently she found what she was looking for: a photograph, post-card size, of four young men; the tallest and handsomest was the man with the knife in his ribs, whose head was now lolling on the body of a silly little, fat little cupid, and whose hair matched his ox-blood brogues. The four had chosen to wear hunting costume. Two of them wore top hats, one a jockey's cap, and the fourth a bowler. They carried carters' whips with long lashes in very dashing style; and the tallest and handsomest had obviously, at the moment of exposure, been crying: "Tally-ho! Yoicks! Gone Away!" His whole attitude, hand curved to shouting mouth, was undeniable proof of that.

Sapphy remembered that it was the tallest and handsomest who had given the name and address to which the photos should be sent. She hunted through the ledgers for the past month—she was sure it had been during August. Yes, here it was:

Reg Black,
Cottoneaster House,
Clifford's Bay.

And now she knew what no one else in Clifford's Bay, nor in England, nor in the whole world knew, besides herself: that a man had been murdered, whose name was Reg Black.

She wandered back into the studio. Would he—would it look different, now that she knew what name to call him by?

“Reg, you look stunning!” That was what one of the Lads had exclaimed. And stunning he had been, but not for Sapphy. Strangely, she had lately developed race prejudices, and They were to her what actors and footmen or waiters are to languid great ladies: you had to have them about you, and that was all there was to it. But Reg . . . “You weren’t half bad,” she whispered. He had called her “ducky.” Well, that was nothing, they all did, but . . . “Hallo, Reg!”

“Hallo, ducky!”

Tears streamed down her face. Why should anyone murder Reg Black, of Cottoneaster House, Clifford’s Bay? Why? Or, more professionally, what, in fact, was the motive? Her mind, recovering from the shock, began to search for an answer to the riddle. First, why murder him? Then, why bring him here to murder him? Finally, why photograph him before murdering him? For the mind has its habits, and hers assumed as a matter of course that if anyone stood behind one of the Dripp back-cloths in the Dripp studio, head and hands thrust through holes to gain an absurd, broadly comic effect, they could not possibly be there for any other purpose but to be photographed. Her eye thoughtfully travelled its accustomed route to and fro between the camera and the client. But the only question was whether he had been photographed first, and murdered afterwards, or knifed first and photographed—oh, but this was horrible, when he was already a corpse!—for some macabre purpose clear only to the unknown homicide. (Perhaps he had to carry back a photograph to the chief of his gang, to prove that he had done

what had been required of him when he drew the Black Ace.)

Following this theory, the camera would be as empty of slides as she distinctly remembered leaving it last night. Her father was very particular about that. But—one slide would be missing from the case in the studio. Shaking now, not with horror any more, but excitement, she checked the slides in the case. Yes, right so far! For a slide *was* missing. Not likely, though, that the murderer would have left it behind. No sense in that. To make sure, she examined the camera.

It held one slide.

Well, now, where was the sense in *that*?

Still, sense or no sense, here was the most valuable clue she had found as yet, and the most astonishing. It stood to reason that no one intent on murder would stop to place a slide in a camera, and then not expose it. He might have been interrupted, though, and have had to escape quickly after the crime but before he had been able to remove the proof of his accomplishment. Steel-trap Jake would be furious over that! For, in the child's mind, lurid novelettes and the mystery of Augs and the actual grim facts now in front of her, were still tousled up one with the other. And still predominant was her desire that Sheila should see her in a blaze of glory; her desire to hear Sheila say, in that clear, confident, well-bred voice of the best sort of schoolgirl: "Well done! Now you be President, and I'll be Hon. Sec., and we must confer every day secretly under the hedge."

Her father had been gone a long time. At any moment now he might arrive with the police; and once the police were in the studio, honour and initiative would be taken out of Sapphy's hands. They might approve, certainly, in

a careless, lordly sort of fashion, of what she had discovered so far, but they would also convey that in two minutes they could have discovered it all for themselves. At any rate, there would be no V.C.'s going about for Sapphire Drupp. Lucky for her, so far, that Dad had been so strangely dilatory. Sapphy simply ached with the desire to develop for herself, with no one looking on, that dark plate hiding its sinister impression; to watch it, while she shook the liquid in the enamel bath, slowly render up, black on white, the features of Reg Black alive or Reg Black dead. She giggled hysterically, thinking of the plump cupid body that in either case would be attached eternally to this last photograph that would ever exist of Reg Black.

"Hope his sweetheart doesn't see it!" with a sudden compassionate cramping of the heart at the very idea.

And then she would take her first print from the negative, still working more carefully than she had ever done before, for Sheila's sake; and only then would she go to the police—they completely baffled and unable to find the slenderest shadow of a clue among the profound web of conflicting evidence that was overloading the sharpest brains in the country—and simply say: Look!

"Well, and why shouldn't I?" After all, it was her studio that had been borrowed, her camera that had been used, her slides, her black velvet cloth—oh, my Gawd! Sapphy had not thought of that! That familiar old square of rusty velvet, it had been drawn over the head of a murderer! Only for a moment or two while he focused, but even then—She eyed it, revolted. "Hope Dad won't think of it." It would be a waste to have to buy a new one.

Her father must have gone for nearly half an hour

already, and the drumming feet and the cheerful clamour of voices on the pier outside the studio were increasing every moment. She could not hope to be left much longer undisturbed. And at that moment came a knocking at the door, which Mr. Dripp had closed behind him. Not the police, but a client's sort of knock. Sapphy called out sharply: "We're not open yet!"

"What time do you open, miss?"

"Sunday, isn't it? Not till ten o'clock."

"Righto! Me and the missus'll come at ten."

"*Will* you?" thought Sapphy. She looked across at Reg. Then she looked quickly away again towards the strip of pale blue sea shaking in the sunlight, that showed beyond the broken window. Then, handling it with the greatest prudence, she removed the slide from the camera, carried it into the dark room, and hid it.

CHAPTER XVI

DRIPP could not help being relieved when the Inspector decided that he was not well enough after his heart-attack to go with them on to the pier. It had been exhausting enough telling his story, though they made him lie flat, and sustained him with frequent sips of brandy. He had been unconscious for half an hour after his collapse on the actual steps of the police-station, with all his gruesome story shut up inside him. Now they'd better hurry along.

"'Urry along," he reiterated feebly, "my daughter, she's alone. I don't like to think of it, what with one thing and another."

For in contrast with one thing and another, it seemed quite cosy and human in this room, with the Sergeant listening sympathetically to his narrative; and three bobbies, in uniform, of course, but without their helmets, concentrating on making him more comfortable, and at the same time ready to rush off at any moment into the zone of danger and mystery. No, he didn't want to return to the end of the pier: and the suggestion that he had better be taken to the infirmary for a day or two, till he had rested and recovered from his heart-attack, was welcome, provided they looked after Sapphy.

They promised to look after Sapphy.

"And don't let no one touch my camera!" he added, but the constables had already left the room and leapt into the car.

Sergeant Coles was agreeably surprised to find the scene

of the murder as yet, so he thought, inviolate from tampering and amateur detection. The holiday-makers at the end of the pier had apparently no idea of the sugar-plum within a few yards of where they stood. Sapphy handed over to him the ledger and the album which contained the hunting picture of Reg and the Lads—the photograph which was afterwards reproduced in every local and London paper which printed news about the Pier Murder Case. This photographer's daughter was evidently a sensible girl, with her head screwed on the right way.

The arrival, at the Cromwell Dripp Photographic Studio, of three policemen, big with suppressed knowledge of something very wrong indeed, naturally drew instant crowds round the door and windows. "Can't do with this," remarked Sergeant Coles; and in a wonderfully short space of time all doors and windows were locked and sealed, and the tensely inquisitive crowds ordered away, not only from that particular area, but from the very pier itself, which was closed to the public 'until further notice.

All that day the swarms and clusters of Augustans adhered round the pier entrance, outside the locked turnstiles, as though by staring at them, and staring down the straight length of the pier before it divided round the concert hall, some news of the matter could be learnt.

And all that day Sapphire Dripp, unexpectedly baffled by not being able to enter her own professional quarters to develop the hidden plate, went about with muttered reassurances to Sheila, who was walking arm-in-arm with Rosemary far away along the residents' cliff: "All right, Sheila; trust me, Sheila! I'll get it somehow, if I have to *swim* out there. They think they can cheat the Society of its scoop—the fools! No one but you and me knows

where that plate's hid, no—nor what that plate's going to reveal!"

As a matter of fact, she did not know herself what it was going to reveal, but fervently hoped it would be a photograph of Reg dead, and not of Reg alive. Reg dead, she had already seen; that could do no more to her. But a vivid, laughing, happy Reg pretending to be a cupid—that would be too uncanny.

She could only hope that in a day or two she would be allowed back at the studio, and could satisfy her half-maddened curiosity. Sergeant Coles had said vaguely that probably after the inquest . . . but, of course, he couldn't tell, it depended, and so forth. The Law was being friendly and not too majestic. Naturally it kept an eye upon the photographer's daughter, who, with her father, would be the most important witness.

Saphy was taken to see Dripp. The terrific experience through which they had passed, resulted, in some curious fashion, in extreme formality of bearing, one towards the other; the hospital felt strange, too, and the brisk nurse who said several times: "Now, I wouldn't talk about what's happened, if I were you." And Dripp was still struggling with an obsession that the murder of one of his clients had been a stroke of revenge or jealousy aimed personally at him by some rival or rivals unknown—probably a whole syndicate. Yes, with branches.

The Walls' ice-cream man did not pass early on Sunday morning in the residential preserves of Clifford's Bay; and the milkman, on the other hand, did his second round too early, during the time when Dripp was still lying unconscious and very blue round the lips, on the bench in the police-station. So that the first to bring even a faint

rumour to the Leighs, of the pier being closed for some sinister reason, was the newspaper-boy. Who told Baxter. Who, in a manner so respectfully off-hand that it conveyed very little of the surging interest in her bosom, informed Sybil: "There's been a terrible to-do, miss, down on the pier. Of course, one never knows. These stories are ser exaggerated. But the pier's been locked, and no one's allowed on it, which I must say *does* seem a pity, on a Sunday, for those who kerr for it. Which I don't myself."

The doctor's wife rang up the Colonel, to say that her husband had been called down to the pier by the police. "Somebody's been killed, so of course he won't be able to play golf this morning. He's *so* sorry. No, of course they didn't say who it was. You know how discreet they always are! All we know is that it must have happened sometime between eight and eleven last night. The pier's been closed."

Sybil started for church. She was going to pick up the Lampeter girls and drive down with them. "We pass the pier, so perhaps we shall see something."

Cousin Nellie naturally began to wonder where she would keep her appointment with Lou at eleven-thirty that morning, if they could not meet as they had planned, at the third seat on the left-hand side of the pier pavilion. She could not ring up Cottoneaster House, but there was a telephone at Glamis, the boarding-house two doors away, and they were very obliging about taking messages round to the Blacks. On the words: "Could you very kindly take a message for me to Miss Louisa Black at Cotton-easter House?" someone, presumably the foreign waiter, was pushed away from the telephone, and someone, evidently the proprietress, bubbling with the lurid news,

spoke to Cousin Nellie herself: "Oh, Miss Burton, you haven't heard?"

"That the pier's closed to-day? Yes, that's why I——"

"Oh, the Blacks are in terrible trouble. Oh, they're quite knocked up by it, and I'm sure I don't wonder. Their elder boy . . . they say he defended himself like a madman, but there were three to one. *Poor Mrs. Black*, and his poor sisters, and his poor father, too. And I saw poor little Len Black for a minute this morning, crying his eyes out."

"But what's happened?" cried Cousin Nellie frenziedly.

And was told that Reg Black had been murdered last night in the photographer's studio at the end of the pier.

Shaking and breathless, Cousin Nellie ran out to tell the family, who were sitting closely grouped together, as only one small portion of the garden was shady at that time of the morning. Colonel Leigh and Alexander were reading the papers, Gordon doing a cross-word puzzle, Bernie moping and drawing spaniels' ears through his fingers, and Mrs. Leigh languidly fanning herself and talking to Colonel Leigh. Alexander was returning to London next day, a week earlier than he intended, but one or two cases had come in which he did not feel justified in leaving to his colleague.

"It's Reg Black who's been murdered! On the pier last night! Reg Black!"

This caused a sensation. For Reg Black to them was not just one of an abhorred ten thousand, but recently and dramatically made significant to them by Gervase's change of heart. Naturally, it was of her they first thought and exclaimed. "My God! Gervase!" "Oh, poor Gervase!" "What will she do now?" "Has she heard

yet, do you know?" "Did they say who did it?" "Are you sure it was Reg Black?"

"That's what comes of it!" from Mrs. Leigh. "Did Alma Bryant say that she and the doctor were coming to lunch all the same, Robert?"

"Yes, they are."

"Oh, good. Then we shall hear the truth."

"What's the matter with *you*?" Alexander suddenly demanded of his younger brother. For Bernie had risen from his chair and was standing in a rather strange attitude. His face had set into heroic lines.

"Would you rather I didn't appear at lunch, Mother?" he asked simply. "I can quite well have it up in my room, you know, or do without."

"Darling, why should you do without lunch? Oh, do you mean because—because you and Gervase—Oh yes, but surely you needn't . . . I mean, I don't see any reason, do you, Robert?"

"Your friends might rather not meet me, under the circumstances. Mumsy darling, we'd better face it."

"Face *what*?" asked Alexander, growing more and more irritable.

"That I'm under a cloud."

"You? But Bernie darling——"

"I shall be the first to be suspected," said Bernie, with infinite satisfaction. "You can't blame them. The first thing the Force always looks for is motive."

Colonel Leigh muttered: "There's something in that. You and Gervase, and then this fellow Black cutting in. Yes, there's something in that."

"If you feel I ought to give myself up——" Bernie began.

A scream from Mrs. Leigh. "But, Bernie, darling, you—you didn't do it?"

"Of *course* he didn't, Mother. Why the hell should you give yourself up?"

"Then I'll wait for them to come and take me," said Bernie, still beautifully under control.

The Colonel remarked, a note of sudden strong relief in his voice: "Thank God, there won't be any of that. Don't distress yourself, Violet. As it happens, he's covered. The murder must have been committed during the time we were all with the Jennings. Let me see, what time did we sit down to bridge?" He did some rapid calculations; it had been roughly estimated that the murder must have taken place between eight and eleven o'clock; and the Leigh family had spent the entire evening with their friends, Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, playing bridge. "Yes! No need to worry, my boy, that would account for you. You've half a dozen alibis, not only your own family—and for about an hour before and afterwards, too."

Mrs. Leigh looked anxiously towards her sardonic eldest son. "That's all right, isn't it, Alec?"

"It had occurred to me and probably to Gordon, from the very first moment. I wonder Bernie didn't think of it, too."

Bernie shook his head sadly, but echoed his father's: "Don't worry, Mum. I expect I shall manage somehow," and conspicuously said no more.

"What's still biting you?" demanded Alexander.

Bernie was reluctant to say in front of his mother. "During one rubber—oh, well, never mind."

"When you ran the car down to the garage to get the rear light seen to?"

Bernie laughed. "A bit awkward that it happened to be me, and that I went down alone."

"I don't see why it should be awkward. The garage is

about three minutes' run from the Jennings', and old Williams knows you as well as I do, and could bear out your statement that you were there all the time he was fixing the lamp. Probably young Williams was there, too, if you want another witness, and you were back within twenty minutes. You could only just have got down to the pier in that time, and certainly not the whole way to the other end and back, and then home again."

Bernard Leigh deeply resented these water-tight alibis. He was bent on being thought guilty of the murder of his picturesque rival. Such a chance for really splendid behaviour might never come a man's way again. . . . "With quiet demeanour and steady eyes, that won the admiration of all who thronged the crowded court, the accused said unflinchingly: 'Not Guilty!' Then he looked across the crowded court towards the girl, white-faced and lovely, in deep mourning, and a reassuring smile played about his lips. . . ."

However, it was useless to argue with his brother Alexander, who was always a spoil-sport; so he merely said, with a gentle shake of the head: "I hope you're right, Alec, old boy; but you know, they always do look for motive first, and knock up the evidence afterwards."

* * * * *

Ninian Wagstaffe, London reporter on the *Daily Special*, arrived at the Esplanade Hotel at a surprisingly early hour on Sunday morning. So did innumerable other zealous reporters, but Ninian was the first to have the idea that the murdered man's young lady's ex-fiancé's family might furnish a provocative interview, with who knows what disclosures of the events of the past weeks.

Ninian believed in finding fresh angles from which to

view a crime. Sometimes, indeed, it was amazing to what lengths he went in quest of a fresh angle.

It was unlucky, when he arrived at the Cliff House, and was admitted by a Baxter unprepared for such visitations, that, instead of finding a family group of chatty, agitated ladies, he only found a taciturn doctor, seated alone, reading the paper in a shady part of the garden. For the Colonel was at golf; Sybil at church; Cousin Nellie in her room trying to write a very difficult letter to her friend Lou; Mrs. Leigh and Gordon calling on Miss Picton-Porter, and Bernie, by a visit to the kennels, proving to Clifford's Bay and the whole world that his head was held high and he was facing the music. Before that he had cut some of Sybil's choicest roses, and left them in person at the Esplanade Hotel for Gervase, not attempting to see her, and sending no message but his card among the roses; thus silently and subtly demonstrating that, in spite of all that had happened, he was in deep sympathy with her.

"How do you do, Dr. Leigh—an honour to meet you," began Ninian Wagstaffe. "I've been sent down by the *Daily Special* to report on this alleged murder. And I thought perhaps it would be a relief to you and your family to know that as far as I can see, and, mind you, sir, I'm in hourly communication with the police behind the scenes, your brother is not going to be implicated. That is, if he has a water-tight alibi for yesterday evening."

"He has," said Dr. Leigh.

"Oh, he has?" This was a disappointment. It weakened Ninian's case for reassurance. So he thought he would pile it on a bit about Captain Bernard Leigh, so as to be able, so to speak, to pile it off again presently:

"Motive points to him, you know."

"Yes, so he seems to think."

"Does he? Oh, I say, poor chap! Awful blow to you if he got arrested!"

"I should never recover."

"Well, I'm working out a line privately, mind you, that if it results where I expect it's going to result, ought to clear your brother at one stroke."

"Won't you sit down?"

Alexander was quite enjoying the conversation of this idiotic, elated youngster. Ninian Wagstaffe was a pale, slender young man, who looked even younger and sillier than he was. He had fair curling hair, large grey eyes behind horn-rimmed glasses and a pointed nose; his throat was much too thin above the soft collar of his shirt, which he wore with a light blue sweater, as suitable working attire for a heat-wave.

"By the way," said Alexander, "why weren't you here a good two hours ago? In these days of the telephone and motor-car and aeroplane, not to mention telepathy and television, you ought to have been on the spot at the same time as the murder, a brisk young fellow like you."

"I was here at dewy dawn," retorted Wagstaffe triumphantly. "Directly I arrived, up I speeds to the pier, under the turnstiles, through a bobby's legs like greased lightning. Couldn't get into the shed itself, though. That was a snag. Never mind, picked up a lot of lurid detail from outside. Back again, into my taxi, along to the digs where this poor chap's family hang out, Cottoneaster House. Funny sort of name. Now look here, sir, this is what I believe I've found out."

Ninian Wagstaffe, sitting on the grass, his knees drawn up almost to his chin, moved himself along closer to his companion, so that he could use a thrilling whisper:

"I believe it was the girl."

Dr. Leigh kept his expression under control, but he received a slight shock. Not that he believed for a moment that Gervase had killed the man whom she so uncontrollably worshipped; but he would rather that the reporter of the *Daily Special* had been pointing his pointed nose towards any other suspect.

Ninian repeated: "You know, *the* girl. Jervis Goldacre."

Alexander corrected his mispronunciation. Wagstaffe was too excited to mind. "Well, anyhow, I believe she did it."

"Oh. Did she tell you so herself?"

"Haven't seen her yet. That's what I went to the Esplanade for. To try and see her, I mean, she being employed there. But she's shut herself up. I got as far as the door and I was shooed out by an awful dragon of a girl, Winifred something-or-other. But you could get me in, couldn't you, sir? I mean, your family know her quite well, don't they? I mean, your brother was engaged to her, wasn't he? So she's a sort of sister-in-law. I mean, sir, if you said: 'Look here, Jervis—I mean Gervase—I particularly want you to do me a favour and grant an interview to a friend of mine'—if you'll do that, sir——"

"Steady," said Dr. Leigh, calming him, for he was sprinkling his "sirs" as though he were brandishing a watering-can full of them. "Steady! Now what's your clue? You're not just suspecting her because she was in love with the man, are you?"

But Ninian had better grounds than that for his suspicions. He had been received at Cottoneaster House by a flapper whom he had supposed at first was a sister of Reg Black.

"No," said Ruthie Green. "That's Jimmy and Glad

you're thinking of. They're upstairs with Ma Black—with Mrs. Black," she corrected herself, suddenly becoming dignified. "With Mrs. Black, the mother of the deceased, who, you'll understand, is overcome with overwhelming grief. Reg was her favourite. He was *all* our favourites," blubbered poor Ruthie, her dignity collapsing almost as soon as it had been assumed. Then, adroitly questioned by Ninian, she had burst out into a passionate denunciation of "that" Jervis Goldacre. "She did it, no one else! I knew soon as I heard! I knew all along before that she'd do something to him one day. She's a sly, hateful beast. She threw a spell over him. Quite different he was before he fell in with her. I knew! I knew!"

It was not easy for Alexander to pierce through the double idiom of Ninian and Ruthie to the exact reasons for Gervase's guilt, if it were founded on fact and not on supposition. Ruthie seemed obsessed with the idea that a girl, especially a sly beast, when she was madly intoxicated with the splendour that was Reg, would be liable just to kill him because he had turned from her on hearing things about her which she hoped he'd never hear. And when Alexander asked wearily: "What things?" Ninian said, less trustfully than before. "Ruthie Green says she has proof," and when Alexander asked: "What proof?" Ninian said: "I couldn't quite make out," and his spirits drooped a little, not much. He was used to these setbacks at the beginning of a really succulent case.

"Anyhow, it's important for me to have a talk with her. Probably I'll be able to tell in a moment. You'll manage it for me, won't you, sir?"

"No, I certainly won't. I suggest that you leave Gervase Goldacre alone for a bit. Take it, if you like, that I'm madly in love with her myself, and I'm protecting her."

"Are you, by Jove?" And then he understood from Dr. Leigh's cynical expression that he was not confessing his dearest secret to a stray reporter from the *Daily Special*, but merely having the said reporter on, colloquially speaking, toast.

"I'll tell you who I think did it," he broke out, after a pause, "if it wasn't your brother, sir, or Jervis Goldacre—I believe it was that kid herself, Ruthie Green, the flapper I saw. She's crazy mad about him; crying all the time, and raging against that girl Jervis, the one who cut her out. They get it bad at that age." And he brought forth a few knowing insinuations regarding the possible state of affairs between Reg and Ruthie before the intrusion of the beautiful Gervase. "It's a cream pashionel, that's what it is!"

"I think," said Alexander, after some deliberation, "that you'd better follow that up." He supposed that Ruthie, if the investigation became serious, would, like Bernie, be able to produce perfectly water-tight alibis. That group always went about in packs of never less than five or fifteen or twenty-nine; and meanwhile it would keep this little fellow busy, cheerful and safe.

"Then I'll tell you who I'll go and see now!" Wagstaffe was on his feet and looked ready to tear off in several different directions. "That other kid, the photographer's daughter, Dripp's daughter. I can easily trace her to where she hangs out. She ought to have a good story. You never know, I mean, perhaps *she* did it. By Jove, yes, she might have, you know, sir! It was she who photo'd this chap Reg Black last time he went there, so they tell me. He was a handsome bloke. Let's say she fell madly in love with him and got jealous at seeing him about with Jervis and made this appointment—yes, look here, sir,

that all fits in! She made this appointment to come back to the studio and photo him, after her dad was safely home in bed so that he shouldn't be in the way, and then she tries to make him seduce her, and he doesn't want to because of Jervis, and she gets him stuck up in the frame, all ready to be photographed, and then comes up behind and kills him! Yes, the knife, you see. My hat, I believe I've got it!"

He scrambled to his feet.

"I trust," said Alexander politely, by way of farewell, "that you will find the blood-stained handkerchief under the maiden's bed."

But already the optimistic reporter had torn off in quest of Sapphy Dripp.

Alexander reflected that this boy would never be the successful owner of a multitude of newspapers. For though he had bothered to tear all the way up the hill on what was presumably one of his busy days, to interview the Leigh family, he had asked practically no questions, and obtained still less information, not even a photograph of Bernie at the age of five. On the other hand, he had put Alexander in possession of a great many most interesting theories, side-lines and irrelevant deductions. Alexander inferred that these might be taken as representative of what the rest of the Press would be saying during the next few days.

Bernie would be disappointed at having missed him.

CHAPTER XVII

SHEILA arrived home on Monday morning from her weekend with the Chaplaynes, knowing nothing of the Pier Murder, save that there had been a murder and that it was on the pier. White Towers was in spirit a great deal further removed from Clifford's Bay than its actual two miles along the East Cliff. The Chaplaynes had a multitude of interests, and Clifford's Bay was to them just the funny little nearest seaside resort, where they did not buy their provender because they got it all down from London. Mr. Chaplayne might, some said, have been careless in letting his young daughter lie in bathing-costume on orange or pink mattresses, drinking cocktails by a swimming-pool in the South of France; but he did, on the other hand, object to any gossip in front of her about horrors or sordid crimes. So Sheila re-entered the Cliff House every inch a Chaplayne.

Christopher immediately pounced upon her and dragged her out into the garden, where they could be alone.

"Come along, come along! Of course you would be away just when the most exciting thing of all happens! Why on earth couldn't you come back directly you heard? Well, what do you think of it? We must have another Special Supplement. I haven't been able to get hold of Uncle Alec, so I've been bursting, with simply no one to talk to except Thomas, of course, and Father said we're not to mention it in front of him, in case he dreams or some filthy rot of that sort. As though Thomas would!

Well, Sheila—*well?*”

“Well what?” Sheila seated herself sedately in a deck-chair.

“Well—this murder!”

“Murders are so horrid. Need we talk about it?”

“But, Sheila——” incredulously, “haven’t you heard?”

“Only that it was on the pier, and the pier’s closed.”

Christopher grunted with relief. He stopped jumping about and flung himself prone on the grass, where yesterday Ninian Wagstaffe had squatted and discussed clues.

“So you don’t know *who* was murdered?”

“It couldn’t have been anybody we know,” argued Sheila sensibly, “because they don’t go on the pier.”

“It *is* somebody we know! At least, we know of him. Sheila——” he sank his voice, and prepared to ram a red-hot poker into her indifference: “Sheila, I say—it’s an Aug!”

“Oh?” Her tone should have warned him, but he was beyond that.

“It’s Reg Black!”

An answering excitement leaped up in Sheila before she had time to restrain it. For a second she almost regretted her resolution to renounce the Aug illusion. What fun to have gone racing off with Christopher along this new delirious trail, with nothing to hold her back, and still believing what she had believed up till Saturday afternoon! Christopher was an infectious companion in this mood, when his very eyelashes, curling back joyfully, seemed to invite you to share his elation. Then she folded away her impetuosity into its chosen sheath.

Rosemary had said that only uneducated people could believe in Augs; and Rosemary had waved in front of her

such splendours as speed-boats and tennis tournaments on the Riviera. Again, for the second time during the last two days, Sheila felt as though she were definitely called out to make a choice, as though a gipsy, telling her fortune, said: "You're at the cross-roads!" She felt gifted with some clear divination which gave her the power to see that she *must* choose Rosemary Chaplayne and all that Rosemary stood for, not only because she most wanted to—and she quite truly hated hurting Christopher, Christopher was much more important than Sapphy—but she must, *must* get free of the Aug game.

She gave a little shiver.

"What is it?" said Christopher, watching her intently, to gauge the effect of his news. "Oh, I say, Sheila! You don't *care*, do you?" Was she going all girlish and tender-hearted, simply because this was a murder and blood lay on the floor?

"Care? About Reg Black? No, of course not. Who killed him?"

"I don't know yet. That's what the Society's got to follow up. It may prove—it may lead to—what *is* the matter? Don't you see how it's all building up? First Uncle Hugh, and then me finding the note-book, and then the Aug Woman coming to tea, and then the Bay rock, and then Uncle Bernie's engagement being broken off for the sake of an Aug, and now this! It's getting clearer and clearer, the way it all moves round our family!"

"But it's not our family. Reg Black is nothing near our family. Even Gervase Goldacre isn't, now."

"Oh, *Sheila!*" His poignant cry, incredulous, despairing, was as though a young lover had arrived in ardent and confident temper, only to find that his mistress had changed over-night, and that nothing he could say could

make an impression on the cold heart that yesterday had been hot to give back desire for desire.

"Sheila, what *is* the matter?"

"I'm not going to play the Aug game any more," said Sheila, leaning down, away from him, to tear up a dandelion and some blades of grass.

Christopher walked off, very quietly, to look for his Uncle Alec. Sheila had said that Uncle Alec had quite certainly been pulling their legs about Augs. And when Christopher had reminded her of the notebook, she had simply shrugged her shoulders. Sheila had said that there was no such thing as an Aug; that they were just holiday crowds, August visitors, trippers—she used the word "trippers" rather often—and that only children or uneducated people or savages could believe for one moment in nonsense like a "race apart."

And Sheila had said that the Fuss had always been, and always would be, a fuss about nothing. And that they must put up with the fact that their own family, Father especially, but the whole family and Nurse, were "queer" to get into such stews about Them:

"It won't be so bad for me in future, because I'm going to spend quite a lot of my time away from home. And you'll be going to Marlborough next year, and Thomas—Thomas isn't impressional, you know. You're the impressional one. That's why I think you ought to know that there's no such thing as Augs. And we've got to live our own life, sometime, so let's begin it now. Really and truly, Christopher, I'm not saying all this just to be horrid."

Christopher had become quieter and quieter, so that she could not guess that he did not believe one single word

she said. And now he was going to Uncle Alec to tell him that Sheila had ratted.

Ratted!

Nice thing life would be, thought Christopher, if it were just dull and meaningless and stupid, with stews and fusses at any moment, one's family "queer" and one's father going mad. . . . Why, what would be the good of being alive at all, without this blazing discovery, this true adventure, that had suddenly transformed it a year ago next Thursday week? You touched a talisman, and everything which had been wrong turned right. You found a black notebook and immediately your people became sane and entitled to your respect; and every person you saw, every item that happened around you, fitted itself, like the brightly coloured chips of the kaleidoscope, into pattern after pattern; and each small pattern fitted into one big mysterious pattern that they were putting together, he and Uncle Alec and Sheila and the photographer's girl and half Thomas.

Not Sheila any longer.

Let her go; they could do without her. What did it matter? The Augs would go on. The Augs would go on and on. Nothing could destroy that.

"We needn't bother, need we, Uncle Alec? I've always heard girls were like that. They get bored with things awfully easily, real things, and just want to flop about and do silly make-believe things of their own. Like Sheila, now. I don't mind a bit, but I just thought I ought to report it. And now about this Aug who's been murdered." Christopher squatted at the end of the bed and hugged his knees in an ecstasy of concentration.

Dr. Leigh, packing his suit-cases, paused and bent a keen look on his young nephew; then went on with what

he was doing. But what he had seen worried him, and what he now heard worried him still more. It was as though Christopher's imagination had been given an impetus by the secession of Sheila, and was now tearing rather beyond the health-line.

"Now, my idea is, don't you see, Uncle Alec, that it's been committed by one of the Brigade. You *know*, the Brigade who have to serve during the Augs' 'carnation at Clifford's Bay. The Brigade get worn out, you see. And then they don't know what they're doing, quite, but they're on our side, the Leigh side. Oh, I say, Uncle Alec, couldn't we call it the Port Side and the Leigh Side—meaning the Augs and Us? Just when we're in a hurry, you know. We'll put that in the *Augan*. But I'm getting surer and surer, aren't you, that They're especially against our family; all the residents, but especially our family. Well, that's all right, because the Society knows now, and can defend its own. But this latest blow seriously confirms my suspicions."

"Why, Christopher?" very gently from Dr. Leigh, wrapping up his boots.

"Why, because you see, of course, Reg Black was the Aug who took Gervase away from Uncle Bernie. He was a principal Aug, too, so that one of the Brigade, half demented, could easily have thought that by doing in Reg Black, they'd be weakening the Aug side, and serving us at the same time. You'll see, when it comes out who did it, it *will* be one of the Brigade. Not a landlady, of course, because they wouldn't be on the pier, but probably a pier official: the turnstile man, or the guard of the train, or the man with the telescope. Anyhow, one of the Brigade. But I can't help deploring their—their gallant effort."

"Christopher, old boy, it's not a gallant effort to stab a man in the back."

"Oh . . . No, well, we won't call it that. Call it mistaken zeal, shall we? You mustn't forget, Uncle Alec, that it's the end of the season, and the strain's simply ghastly for the Brigade. But why I deplore it, is that I don't think it's going to weaken the Augs at all. I think it's going to strengthen Them. You see, it'll give Them a Case. They'll say They can't have one of Their best chaps foully murdered. Anyhow, the point is—I do wish you weren't going away to-day, just when it's all getting so dangerous; *need* you, Uncle Alec?—the point is, what are They going to do next? It's the end of the season, you see, and most of Them'll be going away next week, going away or—or—it depends which School of Thought we're belonging to, just now. If it's that They stop altogether, when Their Clifford's Bay time is over, until next August, will They know, when They sort of take Their shapes again, what's happened, and who's done it? Or, supposing it's found out that it's one of the Brigade, as I surmise, can They stop longer if They want to, and take Their revenge? Is it only volunteer of Them to go away and all be gone by the middle of September?"

"Christopher——"

But Christopher was off on a furious gallop, and not inclined to pull up. "Now this is the idea I've got, Uncle Alec, and it's splendiferous: that when we come to defend our man—the Brigade chap—that we should reveal the whole Aug secret to the whole town, because the Society's responsible for their safety, isn't it, being the only people who've really been in the know about Augs for ages?—Where was I? Oh yes: well then, that we should have a lawyer to defend him—Father'd do, except that we

might want somebody a bit more eloquent, only it would be cheaper to have Father, and then whatever he got paid would go to the Society."

Alexander had made up his mind, now. As far as Christopher was concerned, the Aug game had fulfilled its purpose, and gone beyond it. It had ceased to be of any benefit. So Christopher must know. He closed his suit-case, strapped and locked it, and remained pondering on the best means of achieving his difficult purpose. So he heard nothing of Christopher's further excursions into the chill places of fantasy. They did not feel chill to Christopher, burning with the heat of his own fires:

"*This* would be our defence: that it's not murder, by law or power of princes or act of God or anything, to kill anybody, if they wouldn't be there, anyhow, in a fortnight. If they'd be nowhere in a fortnight. It's not a crime to kill an Aug. It's outside the law. You can only kill a human being who's the same as yourself. I mean, it's only murder when he is. Now, if we can prove what we know: that an Aug is different——"

Alexander rose; came and leant over the end of the bed:

"Christopher! You must stop, old chap. Sheila was quite right. It was all a game. There *is* no such thing as an Aug."

Cousin Nellie sat in the shelter on the esplanade, and looked mournfully at the passers-by, and mournfully at the bustling panorama of the beach, and at the sea, almost colourless under the heat; and found nothing in all these that she could enjoy. It had been all very well, and quite a cheerful business to be alone, before she had known

Lou; but since then they had done everything together, so that now Nellie's mind and Nellie's eye automatically referred to Lou on every tiny occasion, whether Lou was there or not. If Lou happened not to be there, the treasure, however small, however large, was saved up for her.

And to-day Lou could not come out. Well, naturally she couldn't. Poor Mrs. Black—her elder son, her favourite child, and the gruesome manner of his death! Even Nellie, who really did not know Reg at all well, could not help shuddering and averting her mental gaze whenever she thought of all that careless splendour of good looks and good nature and physical exuberance, thrust limply and absurdly through the holes in a canvas screen. But Lou had not been able even to come down for one moment, when, a little timidly, Cousin Nellie had gone to Cottoneaster House this morning, hoping that she might be of some use, somehow. If she had been able to see Lou, it would have been quite all right. She and Lou understood each other so well; and she could divine, even without that glimpse of her friend that she craved, how Lou was longing to get away for a little while, out of all this atmosphere of concentrated misery and horror and tears, to the solace and relief of telling Nellie all about it. But as things were, Nellie felt very strange and timid and out-of-it, as the Blacks had never allowed her to feel out-of-it during their days of jollity. But tragedy—tragedy made all things different, and "I'm not one of the family," Nellie kept on reminding herself, in combat with this feeling that she was an intruder.

An inspector of police had waited with her in the stuffy, garish little sitting-room. He did not speak to Cousin Nellie, nor she to him; and presently the servant

had brought down a note, hastily scribbled by Lou, in reply to Nellie's message. The writing was queerly like Nellie's own:

My dear, I can't leave my poor sister, I wish I could. You will understand how dreadful it all is, and the girls are no good. Well poor things one can't blame them, and the police about all the time asking questions and not leaving people alone when they're in great trouble and the inquest so soon, so must close but my dear must see you as soon as poss. can. Goodness knows how poor Flo is going to bear it if she has to be there, with us leaving at the end of the week. It's been a hard end to the holiday for my brother and them all. And you and I had planned hadn't we to do such a lot during this last week of it. Must close.

Your aff't friend, L. R. B.

Nellie Burton re-read the note, sitting in the shelter, where, she could not help romantically reflecting, she and Lou had first met, and had used so often later as a rendezvous. The closed sides and roof made it especially hot and stuffy, so that it was not patronised during this unnaturally hot and stuffy weather. She sat there alone, and thought of her friend, and presently her thoughts grew more cheerful, as they became more constructive. For after all, she and Lou were independent beings, and could ultimately do as they liked. Families had claims, of course. And Lou naturally would have to devote herself to the poor Blacks for the next few weeks; but after that, sorrow must heal, and Mrs. Black had Mr. Black, and they both had Len and their girls. In fact, she could not quite remember, but she believed there were other daughters, two or three, married and with children of their own, having

their holidays at a different time. Hadn't Mrs. Black spoken proudly of being a grandmother? At any rate, what was there to prevent herself and Lou, when life settled down to being normal again, from leaving their relations and setting up a comfortable little household together? not necessarily at Clifford's Bay, though that would be nice, too, if Lou liked it. Yes, she would be patient now, and not let herself sink into the dumps. And about October she would take a little run up to Lou's home, wherever that was—"How odd, I don't believe I remember!" thought Cousin Nellie, with a soft little chuckle at her silly forgetfulness—and they would have a quiet intimate talk about ways and means, and then——

A small boy came running along the parade, in the direction of the pier. He had no hat on, and his dark hair was clinging damply to his forehead; his face was very pale and his jaw curiously obstinate.

"Christopher!" cried his Cousin Nellie.

He stopped, surprised, she thought even a little dazed, as though he had been inhabiting a world from which all relations had been brutally expunged. Then she held out her hand, and, reluctantly, he joined her in the shelter.

"Why, where were you off to in such a hurry, Christopher?"

"To the pier. Don't keep me, *please!* I've got news. Rather bad news for someone I know, living on the pier." He *had* to see Sapphy, and inform her that both Sheila and Uncle Alec had ratted, and that only he and she were left, and half Thomas. Sapphy was a rotten substitute for Sheila and Uncle Alec.

"But the pier is closed, dear. They've closed it because

of—because of that dreadful thing that's happened. You won't be allowed on."

"I'd forgotten," moodily. "Of course. The Aug was murdered there. I'd forgotten."

"The *what*, Christopher?"

Christopher looked slantways up at her. She was not completely irrelevant to the *dramatis personæ* thronging his mind. There had been the Clifford's Bay rock, and the paddling with Lou; he had heard about the paddling.

"You're friends with one of Them, aren't you?"

"One of who, Christopher?" patting his hand, for she thought he was strange and feverish, and expected to find his hand very hot. On the contrary, it was cold as rain.

"One of the Augs."

Again that odd little word! "Augs?"

And then Christopher told her.

He told her with such intense conviction that Cousin Nellie passed from amazement at these ideas that the child had picked up, to the very borderline of credulity. He told her that she was perhaps the only person in Clifford's Bay who was totally innocent of this recurring menace to the Bay; that the residents had guessed, though vaguely; and that the Leigh family had guessed even more, but did not look that way and dared not verify, but went on as though through a clammy mist; herding the children into safety. But Uncle Alec—and the boy's voice rose triumphantly—Uncle Alec had known clearly from the very beginning, ever since Uncle Hugh was drowned, that the Augs were different, that the Augs were a race apart from ordinary people, and that where the Augs went, one could not follow them. And whether the Augs themselves knew this or not, was

still a riddle to be solved by the Society; and the Society was himself and Sapphy Dripp, the photographer's daughter at the end of the pier, and half Thomas. And Sheila and Uncle Alec. "And a thousand or so other members," Christopher added carelessly, and his mouth, usually mobile with its jolly swagger and urchin grin that was so engaging, was now set into stubborn lines. Not even in narrative to one person, outside the Society, was he going to admit that his sister and his Uncle had ratted; that Sheila was ashamed of the truth in front of her friend Rosemary; that even Uncle Alec had suddenly become tiresome and grown-up, and had denied the truth, for some stuffy reasons of acting for Christopher's good. No doubt as a doctor he had repented having let the children into this dangerous secret. All very well, but it was too late now. Christopher had found the notebook. Christopher *knew* about Augs. He knew more every day.

And as he hurled himself on, he gained strength and conviction, adding itself to the strength and conviction already in him, from seeing Cousin Nellie gradually surrender to the horror of what was revealed. Gradually, he lost that sense of an ebbing, a quaking where all had been firm before this morning. Gradually colour flowed back into a blanched world. It was true about Augs. He had known it was true, but now, seeing Cousin Nellie waver, he knew again, and was reassured and happier; warmer now; not so forlorn. For here was a convert. And *there*, down on the beach, were ten thousand Augs, and five hundred thousand had left by Aug trains and vanished into Aug spaces, during all last week and the week before. . . .

Cousin Nellie struggled to be free from the hypnotic

spell laid round her by the boy's grave sincerity. "It's a game," she reminded herself, again and again. It must be Christopher's imagination that Alec himself, Dr. Alexander Leigh—The child had such a vivid imagination! It *must* be just his imagination, surely? But if a scientific man like her Cousin Alec, a famous doctor respected by everybody, were supporting the children in this—"I must remember I don't know very much about children." But this did not protect her for long. The impact of Christopher's facts battered down her resistance. Already, before he joined her, she had been feeling hysterical and unreal. . . . The heat, and this dreadful murder so close to her, and grieving for Lou.

And then, too, it would explain the queerness of the family about Lou and her going about with Lou; and their behaviour when she had brought Lou into the garden; and her mystifying interview with Cousin Robert; and the way they badgered the children and would not let them go to any nice places at all during part of the summer.

But still, it wasn't possible. No, it wasn't possible. She had lived very much out of things . . . There were astonishing scientific discoveries, of course, which she had never properly understood. And since she had been at Clifford's Bay she had got out from the library Dr. Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, and *Brave New World* by a man called Huxley, and had understood neither. But it proved that weird things were happening all the time. . . .

From an only half-acknowledged idea that Sapphy, too, on this day of treachery, might give him trouble, Christopher had brought along the original small black book, with Alexander's "Notes and Data for a Thesis." Till now, Sapphy had never been shown this family

treasure; it had not been necessary. She had submitted to the truth, without that.

“Here you are. Look!” said Christopher to his Cousin Nellie.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE most important witnesses at the inquest, apart, of course, from Sapphy Dripp and her father, were Miss May Rose and Mr. Herb Brown, who came forward to give the following evidence: That on the Saturday night in question, they had got away from the others, because they wanted to do a bit of spooning by themselves, as their remaining time of holiday was so short; they had therefore chosen, not to be interrupted, a sort of cave under the buildings at the end of the pier. It was not a popular sanctuary, for it was dim and dank and chilly, and very dark; so that unless you were careful, you stumbled over odd supports and posts and chains, and odd bits of rusty iron sticking up, as it seemed, for no reason at all; sudden steps leading malevolently down into nothing except an oily sea, souging at the pier supports, which were hung with great fringes of slippery green seaweed. As Mr. Brown aptly remarked: "If you drop a sixpence down there it slips between the boards and is gone in a moment."

Here, then, not exactly sitting and not exactly standing, leaning up against some creaking support, did Herb Brown and May Rose remain for an incredibly long time, motionless, silent and contented. Cross-examined by the Coroner as to the exact hour when they withdrew to their somewhat sinister hiding-place, Herb Brown said, and May Rose bore him out, that it must have been ten past eight when they first took up their station, because they could hear faintly the opening chorus of the "Humble Servants," a chorus which, of

course, was familiar to them and to everyone. The others were going that night to the concert party, but a bit late, about half-past eight, and Herb and May did not want to be caught by them and plagued to come along in too, as they preferred to get away by themselves. So they got away by themselves before the others arrived on the pier. The concert party began at eight, so it must have been about five or ten minutes past when they went down the washed iron steps to that lower landing-stage at the end of the pier. Then—a good time after that—

“How long after?”

“Oo, I don’t know. A good time.”

“Have you *no* means of letting us know more accurately how long after?”

But all Mr. Herb Brown could say, and all the corroboration Miss May Rose could give, was “a good time after.”

“Would you say it was as much as half an hour?”

“Ooo, I don’t know. Longer than that. Wouldn’t you say it was longer than that, May?”

Miss May Rose would say it had been longer than that.

—They had become conscious of the sound of men’s voices quarrelling on the upper part of the pier. Probably the speakers had been leaning over the rail right at the end of it. “Well, not quarrelling at first, but by the time we could hear them, they were quarrelling, if you get me.”

The Coroner did not quite get him, because how could Mr. Brown and Miss Rose know that they had not been quarrelling at first, if by the time they heard them they were already quarrelling? A more technical explanation by Dr. Bryant of what Mr. Herb Brown had been trying to say, provided a rough idea that the voices were sounding in his subconscious self for several minutes be-

fore their development into a quarrel had brought the impression from the subconscious into the conscious ear . . .

"Good," remarked the Coroner, grimly, "now we can get on."

Unluckily, however, clear evidence was not forthcoming as to what the quarrel had been about, which might have led to evidence as to who was the other man in the quarrel, if the one had been Reg Black. Only one phrase suddenly shouted and repeated two or three times, was perfectly coherent and distinct, though on this one phrase Mr. Herb Brown and Miss May Rose were not in complete accord, Mr. Herb Brown stating it to have been: "There must be unicorns! I tell you, there must be unicorns!" whereas Miss May Rose believed the final word to have been "uniforms," which seemed to her, as she put it to the Coroner and to the court, much more reasonable-like.

After this outburst, the voices had died down again into amiability and obscurity. And finally had been heard no more. Questioned as to how long they remained down below after the voices had become silent, Mr. Herb Brown stated: "Not more than a few minutes." They had been down long enough, and May's Ma, knowing she was not with the others at the concert, and being very particular-like, would have cut up rough if he hadn't brought her home before ten o'clock. The Roses didn't live far; and when they came up, the couple got off the pier without any further lingering, and Mr. Herb Brown was able to deliver up his charge—"his fair charge" he called her, in a sudden moment of levity, rebuked by the Coroner—by twenty-five minutes past.

"Past ten?"

"Yes. I said past ten."

"Twenty-five minutes past ten, Mr. Brown?"

Mr. Herb Brown, who had no doubt been rebuked by May Rose's mother for bringing her daughter home twenty-five minutes later than the hour which virtue and chastity had appointed as the limit, was a bit sore on the subject of the exact time they had spent "down there," and did not relish public as well as private questioning. He had done his duty in coming forward with the evidence, and he thought the old Codger might let him off now. However, he and May had got things fixed up between them sooner than they might have, as the result of all this fuss, so there's good in most things, come to think of it.

Reg's pals, Fred, Art and Les, the Lads of the Village, gave evidence, one after the other, that might equally well have been a trio in musical comedy. Les, speaking first, rather husky, except when every now and then he forgot that the dead man had been his future brother-in-law and a jolly good fellow, related how they had been knocking about the pier together, the whole crowd of them—well, the usual crowd. As the Coroner did not seem to know even this much: "Well, me and Glad, of course, that's poor Reg's sister, and Fred, that's my brother, and Art and Jimmy. Jimmy's Reg's other sister. And Ruthie Green, and one or two other fellows—just the usual crowd, 's I told you. We didn't go to the concert that night, though the others did——"

"What others?"

"The other crowd, Pa and Ma, and their lot. Pa and Ma Black, and Mr. and Mrs. Green." He suddenly went formal over Ruthie's parents. "And Miss Lou Black, that's poor Reg's aunt on his father's side"—with an air of propitiating the Coroner by being meticulous on this one

point—"and, well, we didn't go to the concert, because Reg's young lady couldn't go, so we just sort of knocked round the pier, and then we thought we'd go and beat 'em up at the 'Unicorn'——"

"Ah!"

A thrill ran round the room at this glimpse of a link between the unicorns: the name of the most popular public-house on the front, and the mysterious unicorns mentioned in the quarrel overheard at the end of the pier.

"No, sir," Les protested, misunderstanding the interest he had aroused, "it just happened that that night we thought there'd be no harm in a bit of fun, being Saturday, and most of us got to go home before next Saturday. And we'd had a lot of concerts these holidays, all very fine, and I'm not saying anything against the Humble Servants, but you know how it is, and jolly old Jerry had asked us special *not* to come and dance that night at the Esp.——"

"——the Es-plan-ade Ho-tel," spelt out rather slowly, "Miss Jervis Goldacre—that's Jerry. Well, poor old Reg always called her Jerry." And the Lad's voice jerked and roughened. "Well, we'd been knocking round the pier, just the band of us, and we were all marching off to go to the 'Unicorn'——"

"What time was this?"

"We-ell, I should say—I think you'd better ask Fred that. He always seems to know the time. He's got a wrist-watch. Well, if you press me, I should *say* it was round about 'alf-past nine, might have been a bit earlier, might have been a bit later; and suddenly I said something to Reg, and got no answer, and I looked round and didn't see him, and I said 'Where's Reg?' and then we saw he'd stopped a bit of a way back and was talking to a pal . . .

Well, it was pretty dark where they stood, and I couldn't quite see, but I should say it was no one we knew. Not one of the usual crowd. I sang out: 'Re-eg!' and he called back: 'Righto! You chaps go on ahead. The night is yet young. I'll be seeing you!'

And that, apparently, was the last that was seen or heard of Reg, by the Usual Crowd. Fred and Art added nothing new or startling to the narrative. They were all three quite sure that the pal had been a man, not a woman; they attested this with considerable heat and fierceness, for they did not want jolly old Jerry to be more upset than she was already. All three wished aloud that they had waited for Reg or gone back to fetch him, instead of going on to the "Unicorn" and waiting for him there, after taking the girls home. It had been a knock-out at the "Unicorn," and at any moment they had expected old Reg to walk in and make it even more of a beano. At closing-time they had assumed that Reg had changed his mind after all, and gone to the Esp. to dance with Jerry. Neither the Lads nor the girls of the Usual Crowd were able to give any description of the unknown man who had drawn Reg away from their band. They even contradicted each other about whether he was tall or short.

It seemed that the time of Reg's death had been now established at between nine-thirty, when his friends last saw him, and eleven o'clock, when the pier closed and the night watchman made his round and found no loiterers. More exactly—and this was borne out by medical evidence as to the probable time of death—it must have happened between ten and half-past, supposing that one of the quarrelling voices belonged to Reg Black; supposing also that the possible murderer would have chosen the propitious exit of the throng from the concert hall, at half-

past ten, to leave the pier inconspicuously.

Other interesting witnesses were Mr. and Mrs. Black, Miss Gervase Goldacre, Captain Bernard Leigh, and, as before mentioned, the Dripps, father and daughter. The alibis were all in perfect order, and they had nothing significant to contribute. No motive for murder could be discovered; as poor Mrs. Black herself said, amid tears: "Nobody could help loving our Reg." The Coroner's jury returned a verdict of Murder, against a person or persons unknown.

* * * * *

The pier was reopened on Wednesday; and in spite of the end of the season, and every departing train packed, the Dripp Carnival Studio at the end of the pier did a trade which was half dream-fulfilment and half nightmare—nightmare to Sapphy, because of the ghoulish curiosity that had stimulated such a trade; maddening, too, for her father was compelled to take in a couple of assistants, so that, simultaneously with the actual photographing in the studio, developing and printing could go on all day in the little dark-room; and Sapphy was not able to snatch five minutes alone there, to find out what still lay hidden on the concealed plate.

Nine visitors out of ten to the actual scene of the murder, demanded with stout nerves to be taken with their heads through the same hole in the same back-cloth of flying cherubs. But the police had naturally removed this, with great want of understanding, so Dripp complained. Dripp, drunk with his sudden prosperity, had become incredibly ghoulish himself. There had been a great change in Cromwell Dripp. "It ain't fair," he said to Sapphy, "one prays for 'arf a lifetime for something like

this to 'appen, and folks come along, not only from Clifford's Bay but from miles round, meaning to pay good money for their bit of a thrill, and then you've nothing to offer 'em but Two 'Eads with Crab or 'I Feel a Little Devil!'"

However, he had something to offer them, and that was the sight of the broken window, which he had obstinately refused to have mended; though Sapphy, obscurely hating her father's attitude, had pointed out that as soon as this rotten heat-wave broke and the winds began to whistle in, he would have to do something about it.

"It'll last a bit yet; don't meet trouble 'arfway, my girl. Providence is on our side"—for he had ceased to mutter about rival photographers and ruin—"and this heat'll last out till the last of 'em's gone home. Mark my words, Providence is on our side. We'll be able to set up a regular Art Studio in Shepherd's Bush, where we've always wanted to, near your Aunt Minnie, and not have to keep moving about from pillar to post. And August, in future, we'll be taking our *own* holidays."

It was Friday morning, early, when Sapphy managed at last to develop the plate she had discovered in the camera the Sunday before, while her father had gone for the police. There had been constant necessity, during the profitable rush of the last two days, of imaginary interviews to reassure the imaginary impatience of Sheila Leigh: "I'll get down to it sometime," between her closed teeth, "Don't you worry, Chief. Not a soul in the world knows it's there but you and me. They think, poor fools, they've got the last photo taken of poor Reg Black, but we know better than that, you and me, don't we? *We've* got the last photo, well hidden away. Glad you're pleased with me, Chief. It was nothing. You'd have done the

same. Presence of mind, that's all, and the power to keep your mouth shut. Wait just a bit, Chief. No sense changing anything. I've got to be *quite* alone for this. Dare not risk being interrupted. Suppose some idiot let the light in while I was——? We can wait."

But on Friday morning, Sapphy could stand curiosity no longer, and managed to get down to the pier on some pretext before either her father or the two assistants.

As she carefully tilted the solution to and fro in the enamel bath, she forgot that she was a great detective, a famous sleuth; forgot even Sheila, in the breathless interest of what was slowly developing under the red light. Yes, here it was, forming into coherence, black on white; the familiar back-cloth, the cupids and the clouds; and the head and hands of a man thrust through the screen. Sapphy had been acquainted with the properties of her profession too long to find them grotesque any more. To her it was a commonplace, a large head on a badly-drawn contrasting body of a plump little cupid. She did not realise that she was sweating in the airless enclosure, too intent on—*yes*, it was all right! She sighed, almost sobbed with relief, and at the same time shuddered from a curious sort of hang-over of Sunday morning's horror. For here was Reg *alive*, or—or was it Reg? The doubt grew. It would be difficult to tell for certain from the negative; certainly difficult to tell who was the man with his head poked through the hole, if it were not Reg Black? Sapphy knew she must not hurry, must not make a slip in the familiar process; yet, as she still gently tilted the bath, let the solution flow over the plate, she became more and more certain that she had been mistaken in taking it for granted that she was developing a photograph of the

dead man. That view-halloo in hunting-costume *had* been Reg's last photo, after all. This, then, was even a bigger haul than she had imagined. For if not Reg himself, who could this be but a clear likeness of the murderer they were all seeking?

Sapphy was too excited to try and explain to herself why a murderer should insist on having his photograph taken before he committed his crime. She had done all she could, now, to the plate. It would have to dry before she could take a print. That print would show her who was the man. And if Sapphy Dripp had gone nearly off her head with impatience during the last five days, these five days did not count as suffering at all, compared with the time when she walked up and down the empty studio waiting till she could take a print. She tried to eat up the time more rapidly by forming her exact plan. No doubt her father would be here by the time she got her print, but she wouldn't stop to explain to him. Afterwards would do for that. Just rush through the studio and up the pier, carrying her precious clue in an envelope, so that no one should see it; up the pier and along to the police-station. She was shrewd enough to fear that however elated they might be at having such valuable evidence thrust into their hands, they would at first reprimand her severely for having suppressed it for so long. No matter, no reprimand could dim her glory—glory in big headlines: **SAPPHIRE DRIPP, THE GIRL WHO DISCOVERED THE CLIFFORD'S BAY MURDERER!**

She was not in the studio any more, but back in the dark room by the time Dripp arrived with the first eager clients of the day, who had been waiting outside. He called out to Sapphy. Her answer came in a smothered voice: "Presently, Dad! I'll be out in a few minutes. You

go on—I'm just fixing something. Couldn't finish up last night. Shan't be more than a few——”

* * * * *

It was not Reg. It was not one of Them, either. It was a quite unknown man. Sapphy had never seen him before.

CHAPTER XIX

"I ARREST you, Amyas Brooke, upon a charge of the murder of Reg Black on the night of Sunday, August 29th. And you are warned that anything you have to say may be taken down and used in evidence against you."

Brooke did not seem at all perturbed, or even surprised. The real shock was for his patient, lying with his head back and his mouth gagged, in the dentist's chair, when the officers of the law came in. Brooke merely asked: "All right. Shall I just finish up this job before I come with you? It's a ticklish affair, and I'm rather near the nerve."

The patient made inarticulate sounds and tried to sit up.

The police would not allow the dentist to finish his delicate piece of work, even though he was rather near the nerve.

"Very well," said Brooke, removing his white linen coat. Then he glanced again at the helpless and horror-stricken man in the chair, and added, with a smile: "At least you'd better let me take the gag out of his mouth. He'll be very uncomfortable if we leave him like that."

The Inspector could not but agree, and permission was given; but the patient exhibited signs of frenzy at the notion of having a murderer's fingers inserted between his lips, and tried to make this understood by waving his arms and legs and giving stifled grunts and gurglings. He was nearly choking. Brooke shrugged his shoulders and stood back. There seemed to be a deadlock.

Finally, Brooke was taken off to the station by the two constables, after he had scribbled down the address of a reliable colleague to whom his patient should go at once; and the Inspector remained behind to look through the prisoner's papers and to give what aid he could to the gentleman whose treatment had been so rudely cut short.

CHAPTER XX

AMAZEMENT swept over the residents of Clifford's Bay. Brooke, Amyas Brooke, their nice, quiet, inconspicuous, unremarkable Mr. Brooke, who had never done anything dramatic in his life? Brooke, a murderer? Brooke, the man on the photograph? Brooke to have killed Reg Black?

("You mustn't say that till he's proved guilty," Gordon hastily checked his mother.)

Brooke to have gone down to the pier and broken a window and picked up a knife and photographed himself and stabbed a poor fellow who had never done him any harm?

And after amazement, horror flowed and crashed like the fabulous ninth wave, and then the ninth wave again, without an interval.

Brooke! . . . It was so impossible to imagine the man in any sensational circumstances. Over and over again Nathaniel Cooper was called to narrate exactly what had happened, what had been said, how Brooke had looked, when the police tramped into the surgery and arrested him.

Nathaniel, a mild man, enjoyed his present position as an authoritative eye-witness, as much as he had detested those moments of excruciating discomfort when he had lain helpless in the dentist's chair, wondering miserably why this should have happened to him, and not to Brooke's last patient or his next.

"Well, what was I to do? It was so awkward. You

see, it wasn't an ordinary stopping by any means, but a very delicate piece of work. He said so himself. You see, the *old* stopping wore away, and an *abscess* had formed underneath, and had had to be drained. I'd been to Brooke several times. I always say one should be sensible about one's teeth, and not let things go too far. Father's kept every one of his teeth but two, and he's nearly eighty. But *mine*, they're like my *mother's*—brittle. I often say they might have seen to it, my parents, I mean, that I should inherit some of the good things about them, and not only the bad. It was a big tooth right back in the lower jaw, and he'd said: 'This is going to be a pretty long job, do you mind?' because he had to drill out a bit more of the cavity before he could put in the new filling. Now the worst of it *is*, that I get *nervous*, I don't mind pain, but I get *nervous*, and when I get *nervous*, according to—to that man, I bring forth a lot of saliva, and that interferes with the work, do you see? And then I try and get rid of it, and the swallowing action, that interferes with the work, *too*, you see. And then I get more nervous, and try to close my mouth. So he'd asked my permission to use one of those gags. He was always very considerate," added Nathaniel, who never now spoke of Brooke except as a monster, in the past tense, and with the tribute of a shudder in his voice. "Well, there I was, you see, with my mouth clamped open, three or four of those rolls of cotton-wool between my cheek and my gum, and under the tongue, too, to catch any drop that might be about, you see. And on the *other* side——"

And here Nathaniel Cooper's story was interrupted. Somebody telephoned for Dr. Bryant, and he had to leave immediately. When he was in the hall, he noticed that Miss Nellie Burton had slipped out after him, and was

hovering in a state of trepidation with, obviously, some vital question on her lips that she was afraid to ask.

When she returned to the drawing-room, Nathaniel was in full swing again: "And on the *other* side of the jaw, he'd just done a quick filling, nothing to speak of, and he'd put in a sort of thin metal plate to separate it from the next tooth while it was hardening, and that was screwed in very tightly, and the screw was sticking out quite a long way from my mouth. So that altogether you can imagine I wasn't very comfortable. And he—that man—he saw that. He said: 'I expect you're not very comfortable, but I'll be as quick as I can.' I couldn't say anything, so I just grunted but quite pleasantly because I'd no idea—Well, we none of us had. And I knew he always *was* very quick, and had those sort of supple, neat fingers—*uach!*" The sudden thought of Brooke's fingers and their capabilities overcame Nathaniel, and he uttered a gruesome noise, and got up suddenly and said he would go home, if they didn't mind. But as he had as yet come nowhere near the moment they were so anxious to have described to them, his hearers, a group of at least a dozen or more of the Leighs, the Jennings, the Lampeters, earnestly begged him to compose himself, to remember that he was safe now, among friends, and to go on. So, petted and given a cool drink, Nathaniel Cooper proceeded:

"Well, there I was, and I heard heavy footsteps and took no notice of them, and the door was opened without a knock, and I *did* think *that* funny, and I thought it funnier still when I suddenly saw a policeman upside-down, you know. No, no—" interrupting the chorus of surprise—"I don't mean the policeman *was* upside down. How could he be? I mean that the door was behind me,

and my head was tilted so far back that I could see him that way. And I remember, I said to myself——”

His audience were growing impatient. What they craved to hear were Brooke's own reactions, not the reflections of Nathaniel Cooper.

“Yes, well . . . no. He didn't start or drop anything. He was as cool—He stopped the drill, I'm thankful to say, because what I'd have done if that had been going on with no one to control it, boring its way right through my head——” Again Nathaniel Cooper had to be petted and reassured. “Well, there I was, and there were the three of them, in uniform, just behind me, and one of them reading the warrant, and when he'd finished there was a silence you could cut with a knife!” He looked round triumphant at having found the perfect simile. “Then he said, that man, cool as a cucumber”—once more that triumphant look round at his listeners—“‘All right. Shall I just finish up this job before I come with you? It's a ticklish affair, and I'm rather near the nerve.’ Well, of course, they weren't going to allow that. But the blood, I can tell you, it froze in my veins when they *did* give permission for him to take all the things out of my mouth. Imagine what I felt like, lying there helpless, a murderer's hands coming nearer and nearer! I couldn't utter a word but I fought like a madman, and I'm glad to say that they understood presently what I wanted.”

“I don't know why you didn't let him,” said Hertha Lampeter; “whatever he's done, and we don't know yet if he has, he always gave his patients the best that was in him.”

But Mrs. Jennings violently disagreed with this: and, indeed, they were all aware that Hertha Lampeter had for several years concealed a specially tender regard for

their good-looking young dentist. "You've no imagination, Hertha, absolutely none! I'm deeply in sympathy with poor Nathaniel. The man had committed one unaccountable crime, and at any moment he might have committed another."

"What, with the police there?" exclaimed Violet Leigh.

And Gordon smiled at his mother's faith that no crime could possibly be committed while a man in uniform was present in the room.

Mrs. Jennings still stoutly maintained that a hundred policemen could not prevent a man whose fingers were actually in your mouth from pushing an instrument down your throat.

This naturally upset Nathaniel more even than he had been upset before. For, as he explained in a quavering voice, it had been his instinct which had fought; until Mrs. Jennings had put it into his head, he had not actually visualised the unspeakable thing which Brooke might have done to him.

"Well, there I was," presently, when he had recovered his composure, "doing my best to free myself. I could manage the rolls of cotton-wool all right. They took him away, two of them. One would have thought that he didn't mind a bit, one way or another. There's no doubt he'd been expecting it, or he couldn't have remained so cool. And the Inspector remained behind, I suppose to look through his papers and drawers and so forth, and when he saw I was in trouble with the gag, he very kindly came and tried to help me. And what do you think—" Nathaniel's voice rose to a very squeak of protest—"instead of *loosening* it, he only opened it wider, till I really thought my jaw would crack apart. He was a very clumsy fellow, a very clumsy fellow indeed."

Miss Picton-Porter thought, and said, that Cooper's indignation that they had not sent down a first-class dental amateur from the police-station was unreasonable.

"But Mr. Brooke, of *all* people!" mourned Mrs. Leigh to her family, after Nathaniel Cooper and the Lampeters and the Jennings and the Arundels and Miss Picton-Porter had departed. "It seems incredible. After all, he was a friend of the family, though he was so quiet always. If he'd seemed in the least excited or strange in his manner lately, as though he were going mad, or as though he were dreadfully unhappy about something! But he always seemed to me, whenever I saw him, exactly the same; not a very stimulating man, but exactly the same. Bernie, did you notice anything different about him recently? You've been playing golf together—What is it, dear?"

"As a matter of fact, I *do* remember—it was Mother mentioning golf that brought it back—that last time we played golf together, after the eighth green, he went right off his game. Jennings would remember, too. I'd never seen Brooke play so badly. He was always so steady. Not brilliant, but steady."

"Had anything happened to upset him at the eighth? Do try and remember, Bernie! This may be terribly important. What did you talk about? Did you quarrel?"

"Lord, no! Brooke's not a quarrelsome type. Besides, he was ahead with Alec while Jennings and I were coming up to them."

He did not say any more, but he was wondering, as the Press was already wondering, whether this were a *crime passionnel*, and whether Brooke had also been in love, madly, frenziedly in love, with Gervase. Gervase—*his* girl, Bernie's, if there had been a hundred Reg Blacks!

Nothing would change him; she would understand that by the roses he had sent her. But—Brooke? Was it possible?

* * * * *

PIER MURDER CASE

Special Story

Arrested Man Secretly in Love with Lady
Entertainer.

Did Dentist Kill Rival Rather than Yield Up Girl?

(From our own Correspondent at Clifford's Bay)

NINIAN WAGSTAFFE

CHAPTER XXI

SAPPHY DRIPP's picture appeared in two local and one London newspapers, as the Girl Who Developed the Photograph of Amyas Brooke in the Pier Murder, and so led the way to the arrest. Authority and the Law pointed out to her with some severity that it was not her place to hide photographic plates and keep them hidden and develop them herself, and only then to condescend to honour the police with an account of what she had been doing and what she had discovered.

But Sapphy cared little for censure by Authority. She was lapped in a dream. At any moment a message from Sheila Leigh might arrive. Or Sheila herself might rush up and fling her arms round her, and say in that clear, engaging, rather high voice which Sapphy found so unbelievably fascinating: "You're to come to tea, please, if you will? Grandmother says so. She wants to meet you, because you've been so brave and clever and wonderful. And I told her you were secretly my great friend, so she says you're to come to tea."

This was a long way for a dream to travel, but Sapphy made no effort to clip it and rein it in and keep it within bounds. Any moment now, on the pier, on the esplanade, in the studio—anywhere it might happen.

Day followed day. Nothing happened. Sapphy could not wait in patience any more. She was beginning to be afraid. So she began looking for Sheila, instead of waiting for Sheila to come to her as she had planned. Her search became more frantic. She could not see Sheila any-

where, not even a distant glimpse of her, trim and belted. Twice she spent an evening walking up and down Merton Road, self-consciously turning her head away from the Cliff House every time she passed it. It helped, to snoop round Merton Road, even though she did not meet Sheila. It helped to be doing something, instead of nothing.

Then at last, from the esplanade late one afternoon, she saw, not Sheila indeed, but Sheila's youngest brother, apparently quite by himself, squatting on the rocks on one of the smaller and less frequented beaches. Suddenly a desperate Sapphy decided that she could bear uncertainty no longer. She would ask. She dashed down the nearest flight of steps and pushed her way through the thinning crowds of Augs.

The Arundels' nurse was listening attentively, respectfully, ghoulishly, while the Gordon Leighs' nurse described her recent visit, with Christopher, to Mr. Brooke's dental surgery; described that fiendish monster himself down to the last white linen button on his professional white linen coat. (She omitted to mention that she had merely waited downstairs during the extraction.) There was an air of relaxed vigilance about both good women, pardonable, perhaps, under the exciting circumstances of the hour.

In one of the early numbers of the *Augs*, Sheila had contributed a most thoughtful and interesting paper, exclusively dealing with: "The Effect of Augs on Clifford's Bay Nurses in General, and Ours in Particular."

Ours-in-Particular had revealed, to Sheila's retrospective scrutiny, a curious psychological tendency. For months at a time she would remain dour and impervious to the

charms of any new friendship. Then, gradually, the need of it would seize her, like the need for drink after abstinence. When she had made a new friend, she would be restless until she could get the children out of earshot for a lengthy period. Then she would rid herself of some long, exciting story to this new friend—obviously the story of Uncle Hugh's death. When the children trooped back, they would find Nurse flushed and excited, but soon she would calm down and become her own brusque, reticent self, would see very little of this new friend for a week or two, and be fussier than ever over her charges.

But the Arundels' nurse did not play a part in this psychological sequence, for by propinquity she was a natural companion who would always go about at Clifford's Bay with the Gordon Leighs' nurse; so that their friendship was apt to be a tepid, drowsy affair, and they had plenty of energy and vigilance left over from it to devote to the children.

But the Pier Murder and the arrest of Mr. Brooke, had galvanised them both into a state of natural, wholesome gossip, so they did not notice that Thomas had got bored with the Arundel children; that they had all stopped piling sand on their castle, and were standing, digging with their spades at their bare toes, while they argued, Thomas stolidly, Pamela and Michael already slightly hysterical. It was about arquebuses. Those ignorant Arundels had an idea, which in vain they strove to make clearer to Thomas, that arquebuses were a form of vehicle, a sort of pre-horse bus, probably used to drag guns in ancient days. But Pamela, in particular, was extremely inarticulate, as well as absolutely incredulous. Thomas knew all right that you had to leave loop-holes in the sides of the castle, under the battlements, for arquebuses to shoot

through; but the Arundels said: "What's the good? They can't drive *up* there without a road, and you can't have a road going up the sides of a castle." Thomas said, getting weary: "Who wants a road?" and Pamela and Michael said: "We let you do the battlements. Now it's our turn." Thomas found he had had enough of both of them, and of the castle and of the battlements and of the arquebuses; he merely said: "All right," and marched off, trailing his spade behind him.

He expected, as usual, that that persistent, deadly call to come back would follow him from the nurses; but it was no good anticipating; and he was rewarded, for they did not call him. He plodded on and on till he reached the rocks. It was low tide and late in the afternoon, so that there were very few people on the rocks. He had a peculiar feeling of enchanted territory, as all the seaweed smells and crab smells and rock smells drifted up for his nostrils' delight. He crouched down, without bothering about the sunset, but intent on the darting shadow-life going on in the fringed gold-lit pools. Now, if only people would leave him in peace, if only nobody called: "Thomas! Thomas!"—

Somebody *was* calling "Thomas!" but nothing quite so tiresome or so adult as a nurse, father or aunt. Thomas did not even straighten his shoulders; barely looked up, as he said: "Hallo."

Sapphy Dripp said: "Hallo, what are you doing?"

"Nothing." He was holding a hermit-crab in one hand, watching while it stretched its head and claws out of the shell, until an invisible spring jerked it back, and it had to begin the stretching process all over again. Thomas had, in his time, examined hundreds of these creatures, hoping that he would find, some day, a hermit-crab that could

overcome the power of the invisible spring, and crawl right out of its shell.

A breathless Sapphy, her casual voice painfully overdone, asked: "Where—where's your sister? Sheila down on the beach to-day?"

"Sheila? No, she's away again."

"*Away?*"

"Staying with Rosemary Chaplayne. Rosemary's awful. Like a beastly doll."

"Is she? Doesn't Sheila like her? Did she have to go?"

"No. She wanted to. She doesn't know Rosemary's awful. It's a big house with lots and lots of servants, and they ride with a man riding behind them. Sheila'll talk about it for years when she comes home. She's been before."

If Sapphy had been threatened with death, she could not have helped asking her next question: "Did she leave any message?"

"To who?"

"Me."

"No."

"Oh."

"Did you expect one?"

"*No!*" vehemently.

Suddenly Thomas stopped crouching over the hermit-crabs, laid them carefully back into the water, stood up straight. "It isn't any good, you know. Sheila's always like this. She doesn't really want to be friends. Unless, of course, it's someone like Rosemary; *then* she does. And anyhow, she's dropped the Society. Hasn't Christopher told you?"

Sapphy, gulping and miserable, with a terrible coldness

in her stomach, a coldness that hurt, muttered: "Did she see my picture in the papers?"

"I don't know. She didn't say. But it wouldn't have made any difference. What," asked Thomas, not unfeelingly, "are you bothering about?"

"Nothing."

Thomas knew all about nothing. It was his own favourite reply, and he respected its reticence.

("Nothing! Thou elder brother e'en to Shade,
Thou hadst a being ere the world was made.")

So he said something solemn and polite about the distinction of having had her picture in the papers. "You must be awfully clever to be able to develop photos. Proper photos, too. I wish I could." And, to give her time to recover from the crying fit that he perfectly well saw, but knew that she would not wish a so much younger child to have noticed, he went on to describe the time, a month before last Christmas, when he and Sheila and Christopher had been taken to London, to Grey Saville's famous photographic studios where they were so excellent with children. Their grandmother had wanted some particularly special "studies" of the children to be ready in time for their father's birthday last January.

The study of Sheila alone turned out extraordinarily successful; those of Thomas and Christopher alone rather less so; those with Thomas and Christopher and Sheila together were good of Sheila and Christopher, not so good of Thomas. Thomas described the large airy rooms with their delicate tinting of duck's-cgg-blue and white, their frieze depicting in modern style the adventures of Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, the numerous amusing mechanical toys strewn about casually

as though it were indeed an expensive nursery, and not a photographic studio at all; described them with a genuine preference for the Cromwell Dripp Carnival Studios on the pier, which ought to have been consoling to Sapphy. Thomas judged that, on the whole, Dripp's premises were more professional, and certainly more interesting, in that they were in all ways so different from one's own home, instead of merely an artistic improvement on it. He was terribly contemptuous, too, of the way that Sheila had shown off with Mr. Grey Saville himself, who had treated her as an equal and delicately complimented her on her profile.

Sapphy, older than Thomas in this, realised at once how Sheila must have revelled in the well-bred atmosphere, so harmonious, so distinctive, so exactly "right" for Sheila's taste; and thought Thomas was being cruel. Where Sapphy went wrong, was in thinking that Sheila all the time must have been making derogatory comparisons with the Dripp establishment. Sheila had not thought of the Dripp establishment at all. They were beyond comparison.

Sapphy interrupted to say passionately: "Then you can tell Christopher that I'm not belonging to the old Society any more, either."

"Oh, aren't you? Because Sheila's gone out of it? Then you didn't believe in Augs, you yourself, without Sheila?"

"Doesn't matter if I do or if I don't. No, I don't!" finished Sapphy, surprised, even in the midst of misery, at this revelation within herself. "Do you?"

Thomas did not know, in so many words, but he had a pretty shrewd idea. He had certainly been impatient of the Fuss, the prohibitions which his instinct deemed un-

necessary in spite of the Society's explanation of their vitality. On the other hand, implicit in him was a feeling that the only intelligent way was to accept the Augs simply and without fuss, and trust to sense to look after itself, should individual crisis arise.

As a half-member, he had not thought it necessary to declare the withdrawal of his half-allegiance. Sheila had abandoned the Society, and now so had Sapphy. He foresaw, however, that Christopher would only cling to it with fiercer zest, would make Thomas's life a burden to him, and would cite Uncle Alec over and over again as the foundation for the crusade; Uncle Alec's notebook, and Uncle Alec's contributions to the *Augan*—everything that Uncle Alec had ever said about Augs. Nevertheless, Thomas still felt that he and his Uncle Alec were, as usual, in some unspoken accord, and that it would be time enough to worry over setting it into words next time they met.

"Uncle Alec said when he said good-bye that he was running down again in a week or two. 'To see what you children are up to,' he said."

"I don't care," from Sapphy, brooding beside him.

"I like Uncle Alec ever so much better than Uncle Bernie. Uncle Bernie's been under-a-cloud, and he's cross because he isn't any more. I don't know what he meant by under-a-cloud, but it doesn't sound much fun. Uncle Alec's going to take me into a partners' ship one day."

CHAPTER XXII

THE up-train that Sunday night from Clifford's Bay was sure to be crowded, for it was nearing the end of the season, and hundreds would be departing to take up their jobs early on Monday morning, but wished to have their holiday fun up till the very last moment possible. The platforms had been quiet enough all through the hot, heavy-coloured day, but naturally you had to be there early or you wouldn't get a seat; and besides, there was the luggage, and never more than one or two overworked porters to be seen. Not that that mattered, because, helped by the huge party of friends who came to see you off, you could manage all that better for yourself.

But still, arrive early. Plenty to do at the station; and trains were unfamiliar beasts. You couldn't be quite certain that they might not dash into the station, darkly snorting, and take you unawares while you were still panting up Railway Approach; and dash out again, not caring, into the blackness of the tunnel just beyond.

So better be early. It was *due* (but the Augs were ever suspicious of its good intentions), it was *due* at 9.25. So actually, from about five to nine onwards, the platform from end to end began to fill with hilarious groups. To every four or five departing Augs there were at least a dozen fellow Augs from the same boarding-house, to see them off. They had all sat at the same table, or called to each other across the room from smaller tables; shared the same jokes; played cricket on the sands; banded

together on picnics; brought enormous quantities of communal gusto to whatever amusement the place had provided: pier, concert, beach, bathing, donkeys, cafés; crowded their broadly-smiling faces into the same snapshot groups; followed enthusiastically the same novelties in clothes——

And now here they were, suitcases filled to bursting; the children carrying their spades and pails which for some reason were never packed, the pails also stuffed with incongruous left-overs from last moment packing. Mail-carts and bicycles were stacked against the station wall opposite where the over-worked porter prophesied that the luggage-van *might* stop. Mounds and hillocks of luggage all down the platform . . .

“Got your tickets?”

“Yes, I got ’em.”

“Where’s Mil? Don’t say you been and gone and lost Mil, when I told you to——”

No, here was Mil, embracing a penny-in-the-slot machine: Caramels, Biscuits, American Roasted Nuts, Perfume, Chocolate Cream, Matches, Cigarettes . . . Still some last moments of fun to be squeezed out of the holiday: weighing-machines for instance——

“Go on, Auntie! Come and be weighed. I’ll stand you. Mind you don’t break the machine.”

Roars of laughter, even from people not in the same group, for parties were overlapping and mingling in the smudgy gas-light; and mild laughter became a concerted roar when it was discovered that Auntie Bee weighed nineteen stone and some odd pounds, *but* had forgotten that one hand was still grasping a suit-case. This was a grand joke to finish up with, and laughter swelled into choruses, not unanimous, but rival choruses, as each

boarding-house loyally plugged its one chosen marching-song:

"It's the Roast Beef of Old England
That brings us back to Charlton House——"

strove against:

"Look at the *sea*-view, look at the *ice*-cream,
Ain't it grand to be back at the Fitz?"

Eleven minutes, twelve minutes, fifteen minutes past nine. It would need a monster train now, to swamp the roar of sound that was rising from the up-train platform. The favourite jokes had been torn up from the soil in which they had been planted: boarding-house table, parade, beach, pier and charabanc, and were brought along to the station and transferred to the train and presently to the home. They would not die for a month or two, these jokes. They were too near the heart for that; splendid, tough, universal, flourishing jokes:

"Now then, Miserable, what's the matter? Thinking of the gas you've left on at 'ome all this time?"

"Oo, Uncle, what's your other wife going to say when she knows you've been away with this little bit of fluff? *You're* going to get into trouble to-night, you are!"

"Don't you sit next to Ted in the train, Lil, not with that tunnel so close. Ted's a terror in a tunnel! You 'ang on to the alarm cord, *tight!*"

"Well, Mister, you won't be so uppish to-morrow, when you see ma-in-law again. Better make the most of it now!"

"Pull your socks up, Hiawatha!"

Twenty past nine. In five minutes the train was due; already the good-byes had begun; they became vociferous, urgent.

"Well, good-bye!"

"Good-by-eel!"

"Don't forget to write."

"I'll send you a postcard directly I get home!"

"Yes, do!"

"Wish we could have gone to the Humble Servants once more. Lucky you, having another three days!"

"*We* know who your pash is! Shall we give your love to the soulful tenor?"

"No, don't you. He's had too much of that from me already. Want some for myself, when I get home!"

"Well, good-bye. Sorry you're leaving. Still, you did bring the fine weather with you, didn't you? Expect you'll take it away again."

"Yes, it's not going to last."

"No. Break almost at once, I should say."

"Yes. Too hot to last."

. . . "Good-by-eel!"

"Good-bye, Auntie. Don't you tell 'em at home what you told me on the pier."

"Get on with you! You made it all up."

"Oh, no, I haven't. Couldn't have believed it, if I hadn't heard it. Worse than all them girls, you are!" . . .

"Well, I declare, kid, you're properly kippered. The cat won't know you. He'll be thinking you're a smoked haddock before you know where you are."

"Well, don't you let the engine-driver see that peeling nose of yours, or he'll go right orf the rails. Better cover it up—wear a nose-bag, I should!"

"Oo, you *are* awful!" . . .

"Well, good-by-ee, see you next year?"

"You bet! Good old Fitz!"

The war-cry was echoed by all those who were wearing white linen American sailors' caps, with the name "Fitz" inked on them, and fought with the yells of "Good old Charlton House!" "What price 'Bannockburn'?" from others, whose badges proclaimed that they were staying at these Clifford's Bay boarding-houses. A stronger note of rivalry crept in, as each group defiantly shouted at the other, and the choruses swung up again with more of good-natured truculence in their beat, feet stamping, spades tapping, hats waved on sticks.

And so, to martial music, the train rushed into the station.

Without interruption of the singing, a unanimous movement down the whole length of the crowd showed them mistrustfully pressing backwards in an attempt to flatten themselves against the wall, as though the engine might tear a destructive way on to the very platform. And then, as they realised that the train was not going to do any such thing, a surge forward, dangerously near the moving carriages.

"Hooray-ooray-ooray-ooray-ooRAY!"

* * * * *

The Black family, and their friends the Greens, all dressed in improvised mourning, remained sadly huddled in the waiting-room until the last possible moment. The Lads of the Village had already gone, two days earlier. Ma Black had specially petitioned of their other friends that no one would come and see them off. There had been, naturally, a certain amount of sympathetic relief in acquiescing to this. In other years, the Blacks' and the

Greens' party, led by Reg, had been the liveliest on the station.

"We'll never come back to Clifford's Bay again," whispered Mrs. Black, breaking the silence of the isolated group.

Lou was remembering last year, and Reg's prank which had taken in all the crowd on the station. He had assumed a porter's voice and shouted out an indistinguishable string of names, so that everybody had picked up their luggage and looked down the line expectantly. And, of course, there was no train. It had been a grand hoax; Len had relished it especially, and Mrs. Black had scolded her son proudly: "Reg, you ought to be *ashamed!*" . . .

Nellie sat with them, upright and miserable on the bench between Len and Auntie Lou. She was the only outsider from their grief, and felt herself so. She was too uncomfortable even to hold Lou's hand; besides, it would not have been right, somehow, though she knew perfectly well that she and Lou were closer akin than Lou even to her relations, who, after all, had each other. Yet during these hours since the Picr Tragedy, Lou had belonged temporarily to her brother's family, and Nellie felt timid of forcing herself in. Presently—soon—but she dared not whisper even to herself: "In six weeks or two months," as she had done with the cheerful future reassuring the fitful present.

She had not dared ask for Lou's address. And Lou, uneasily enough, though she repeated several times: "I'll write to you, dear, directly I get there," had somehow never said where "there" was. In spite of the mysterious barrier, Nellie still hoped she might perhaps find courage, before the train started, to ask, to write it down, and somehow

more securely to fetter her vanishing bliss. She even prayed that she might, sitting there on the bench with the Blacks and their luggage, and the Greens and their luggage, and all the noise outside. That one bleak sentence of Mrs. Black's, though natural enough, yet sounded ominous to Nellie: "We'll never come back to Clifford's Bay again" . . . of course they wouldn't. They couldn't. But Lou might. Or they could go somewhere else, she and Lou; not wait till next summer. Why should they? But soon, as soon as it was decent for her to write and propose it . . . She tried to murmur, with dry tongue and nervous lips: "You haven't given me your address yet, dear," or "You've forgotten to give me your address." But the words refused to come, and they were singing outside, and it was twenty-three minutes past nine.



CHAPTER XXIII

DR. LEIGH had been in a hurry to get back to certain cases in town, when he had left Clifford's Bay ten days ago. Nevertheless, in the slits of spare time during a thoroughly laborious period, he had continued to be somewhat worried about Christopher; continued to wonder whether he had perhaps allowed the Aug game to run too far. Not too far for Sheila and Thomas, that was obvious; but Christopher was like a certain texture of thin paper; you could burn, but not tear it.

Certainly the game for which Alexander was responsible had been amazingly good for all of them, until recently. But how the boy had talked of it, that last morning, while his uncle was packing to go!

Alexander managed, after about ten days of recurrent uneasiness, to clear an afternoon and drive down to the Cliff House to see if all were well. The heat wave of the last three weeks had not yet broken. Those Augs were lucky, reflected Alexander, unconscious that he could not now do without the idiom he had invented, those Augs were lucky who had taken their fortnight any time since about August the sixteenth. The air felt as though it would crack at any moment, and the way out of London seemed interminable.

A startling event had happened since he had last been down at the Bay. Brooke had been arrested for the Pier Murder. Queer, that! Apparently the man had not even denied it when he had come up before the magistrate. Alexander had a special permit to see him early next

morning at Lowhampton Gaol. With a bit of luck, he would still be back in London with his patients by eleven o'clock. Hospital day, to-morrow.

Clifford's Bay at last. You descended into it, by car, from the "wrong end," according to Mrs. Leigh; the Aug end. Rushing past Clifford's Bay Park Gardens, he saw Gervase Goldacre, in a thin rag of black, entering one of the gates. Indulging an impulse, a thing he very rarely did, Dr. Leigh pulled up his car, impatiently interviewed the parking official who sprang up out of the pavement, and followed Gervase.

He found her sitting in one of those iron arm-chairs like the slats of green Venetian blinds.

"Hallo," she said, listlessly. "What are you doing here?"

Alexander replied, in the word of the poet and in the word of his nephew Thomas: "Nothing," and sat down beside her in another iron arm-chair.

The gardens were almost deserted, partly because most of the summer visitors had departed on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday; and partly because the long-threatened break in the heat wave was now so near that at any moment those first ominous drops might splash and then pelt from a brooding grey sky; already the trees were moving and swaying, although there seemed to be no wind to stir the airless air. Even on fresh days of sunshine, Clifford's Bay Park Gardens were not especially enchanting; too many crossing paths of grey asphalt, too much laborious bedding-out in the grass. There were grotto effects, of course, with real water lying in dull pools among artificial rocks; and there were shell effects, too, and fern effects, and hundreds of chairs like the two on which Alexander and Gervase now sat and talked at last of what had happened.

"It's so funny," said Gervase suddenly, "of course the papers have got to lash themselves into fits about it, but he wasn't in love with me."

"How do you know he wasn't in love with you? Brooke's a silent, reserved sort of man."

"He wasn't," positively, "or I should have known. I've read in books and seen plays, not always rubbish, either, sometimes the very highbrow kind, about men and women who go for years without telling their love, and the other one doesn't even guess it. That's just not true. When you're with them, there are a million ways of telling. They can be careful over the things they say and the way they talk, but if they love you, you *know*. You, for instance."

Alexander jumped. Then he caught her smile, which for an instant held a lift and a gleam of the old mischief, and he subsided again with a grunt of relief.

"If I were in love with you, Gervase, I should smile ironically at what you say, and not give myself away; and you'd *know*, is that it?"

"That's it. So you're not. But you can understand that other people are, or have been. You're at that stage. Brooke wasn't even as far as that, with me."

"So much, then, for the cream pashionel."

She stretched her arms wearily, and repeated: "So much for the cream pashionel."

"You're tired, Gervase."

"Dead tired."

"When are you going back?"

"Dunno."

"What are you going to do?"

"Dunno. I'd like to have gone to live in Merton Road for ever, without moving."

He realised again that in some curious way the feeling of Merton Road attracted her, the safety of its gates and gardens, the lack of tension and excitement about its measured slope up to the pleasant cliff walk. Merton Road to her symbolised the residential side of Clifford's Bay, and she had never been residential, there or anywhere else; but her longing to live there had no connection with personalities. Therefore, he did not at once say heartily: "Oh, but do come and stay with my mother for a few weeks. I'm sure she'd be delighted to have you!" But he encouraged her to talk, believing that it would be good for her.

"Do you hate him?"

"Brooke? Not particularly. Doesn't it make one feel limp, this heat and this awful park?"

"Yes, why are we sitting here?"

"Don't know."

"Shall we go?"

"Might as well stay. Considering it's a public place of amusement, we're almost alone, which is a blessing. Thank God this ghastly season is over!"

He knew that she had been persecuted ever since her lover had been murdered, by every Ninian Wagstaffe who had rushed down to Clifford's Bay intent on scooping up what intimate details he could, from Reg Black's girl; and there had been the inquest on top of it; and probably emotional scenes with the Blacks before they left last Sunday. Had she no one belonging to her, Alexander thought, irritable because he felt so deeply compassionate towards her. Was she wholly derelict? jetsam flung up on the shore? washed out to sea again? He asked if she could not go and stay with someone who would look after her and make her comfortable for a while?

"Mrs. Black asked me if I wouldn't."

"*That's* no good!" frowning at the idea. "Besides——"
Their eyes met, she smiling a little.

"Wouldn't it have been funny, Alec, if I had married Reg, as I meant to, and gone away with them, wherever it was?" Suddenly she flung back her head and cried: "I was going gladly, without a single qualm. Gladly, I tell you, with Reg. Reg was worth it."

He wondered, at the break in her voice, if she were going to cry? Or whether, like the child she was in all the qualities where she was not piteously old, she had cried herself out? Her eyes were more enormous than usual, but they were less suffering than bewildered, and she could still laugh and ask rapid questions and tease him a little. And because they were in that sort of mood, he was able to ask her now, without strain or effort, whether her whole life were smashed to pieces because of the loss of Reg, or if she felt that she could pick up and go on?

"It's begun to rain," said Gervase suddenly, raising her face as though she desired the coolness and relief of rain, "I saw a drop. It splashed just between us."

"Are you sure? I didn't feel anything. I don't think the skies have cracked yet."

It had not been rain, but a passing gull; and the splash had been on Alexander's shoulder. He was slightly disgusted.

"Oh," cried Gervase, in bitter disappointment, "all on you, and none on me! It's luck, you know."

"Much obliged," sarcastically to the gull and to the universe and to Gervase; for Dr. Leigh was not superstitious.

"Don't brush it off! It's *luck*, I tell you! If it had been me——"

"You'd have left it on your dress for ever. Grubby little idiot!" said Dr. Leigh tenderly.

She answered his earlier question as though no gull had interrupted: "I ought to be smashed to pieces, I suppose. I was madly in love with Reg, as madly in love as any girl could ever be, only—I can't understand it, Alec—but I believe if Bernie had been killed, I'd actually have felt it more; now, I mean; now, afterwards. I wouldn't have *minded* more; I'd hardly have minded at all, because— But I'd have *felt* it more. Oh, I can't explain; it's so queer. While Reg was here, with me, next to me, touching me—oh, you remember Reg, how alive he was and how splendid! But ever since he's been dead, he's slid away farther than any other man. He's as much over-dead now as he was over-alive before. Am I being soppy, Alec?"

He murmured: "'Soppy.' 'The Augs had a word for it.'"

"What are the Augs?"

"Short for August visitors."

"Oh . . . You *do* understand, don't you? I do want to make you understand, because it's been bothering me, and I've wondered if I'm callous, or—what is it they call it?—numb from shock, or delayed something-or-other. But Bernie, he was a good old thing, but not thrilling, was he? One couldn't be in love with Bernie in the same way."

Alexander heartily agreed.

"And yet if Bernie had died—now, nearly two weeks afterwards, he'd still have been more only-just-passed-away and still-with-us and it-seems-like-only-yesterday, than Reg. Is it that Augs die less gradually than us?" She used the term naturally, as though she had

been using it all her life.

"I think that Reg was utterly present, but never potential." He added tentatively: "That's in the nature of an Aug, isn't it?"

"He's not *there* any more!" cried Gervase desperately. "I want him back, but I can hardly remember him. And next Saturday it will be only two tiny miserable weeks since he held me, since he kissed me. Do you know that one can't remember films that one has seen, as well as one can remember plays? At least, I can't. And yet, while I'm looking on at them, I'm even more caught. Oh God, it was the most glorious thing that's ever happened to me, and he's dead, and not a shred of it's left, not even minding!"

A man stood in front of them, holding out his hand. He was the park officer who supplied chair-tickets. Alexander hastily bought two, with that universal criminal air of never having intended to pay for his chairs at all, but being baulked in his intention of getting up and stealing away just before the man came on his round.

"Thank you, sir. Sit 'ere now all day, if you like," said the man, feebly joking.

"I'm afraid the rain will drive us away presently."

"Yes. 'Eat wave's going to break in the next hour or two. No doubt about it. And I shan't be sorry, for one. Bit of a relief now that most of the folks have gone." He touched his cap and went on, leaving it a matter of doubt whether the relief were for the impending rain or for the end of the Aug season.

Gervase remarked sympathetically: "He looks a bit thinned out and ground down. Not much sap left in him, I should think."

"No, his face is about the same colour as yours, my child."

If he had hoped to rouse her into any spirited interest in her complexion, he was disappointed.

"Well, yes. It would be. We belong to the same company."

"You and the chair-man?"

She nodded. "We're the Propitiators, both of us. The Aug Propitiators. It's our job. Yes, and in a way a sort of charge, too, that's been laid on us, to keep Them amused, to keep Them happy, to keep Them interested. Only for a month every year, a month and a bit over, and then we can rest, the whole company, drop down and rest, and live on our profits, and gather together what's left of us, and be strong again in time for next year. But during the time itself, there's no help, we've got to keep the pace."

Alexander was startled, and rather dismayed. Surely Christopher had been jabbering about very much the same thing, though he had not assembled his dreams and ideas, nor used the word "propitiators." What was there about this fantasy that infected everyone who touched it once? The photographer's daughter, according to the children, had hardly required to have it explained to her. Brooke, too; how easily Brooke had assimilated the trick of the game and been compelled to contribute to the fantasy. And was he, himself, wholly detached? Alexander, after a swift but drastic examination, had to own silently that his gusto had not been only for the sake of amusing and reassuring the children.

"Once," continued Gervase dreamily, her eyes narrowed to a not very happy remembrance, "once, before I began to work myself, I saw a clown, I mean a man dressed as

a clown, with a sort of portable piano, and he'd put it down on the kerb of a side street in one of the seaside places, and sat down to sing. It wasn't a very good pitch, and anyhow it was the end of the season, like now, and no one listened. I think he hadn't realised that the Aug season was over, and was going on mechanically. He had a white face and a funny red nose and comic eyebrows. just the usual painted-on clown's face. I wouldn't have noticed him, except that no one was listening."

The chair-man was coming back. "Have I seen your tickets, sir?"

Alexander, silently marvelling, held them out. The man touched his cap, and dragged on.

"Good God!" exclaimed Dr. Leigh, "why, the fellow can't have been to more than about half-a-dozen occupied chairs since he left us."

"He'd probably have remembered a month ago, if he'd been to ten times as many. I tell you, we're all tired out when September comes; the whole band. It's not a pose."

He scrutinised her. One could not lounge in the iron-backed green chairs, so she sat upright in her dress that was like a thin black rag, with a limp white harlequin lozenge in front, and looked thinner than ever.

Alexander began to catalogue, half aloud, the rest of the Brigade; the band of Propitiators, Purveyors, Entertainers of the Augs: "Photographers; well, the Dripps and all the rest of 'em, but the Dripps got something big out of it, this time. Pier officials; people who run pleasure steamers; people who sell souvenirs; donkey-boys; lightning-artists; outside-porters; guides to castles and caves; charabanc drivers. The whole Aug catering tribe: shrimps and doughnuts and Kola and winkles and cockle-teas.

Let me see——”

“Landladies,” supplied Gervase.

“——landladies, naturally. They’re a huge section. And landladies’ slaveys.”

“Known as The Girl.”

“Known as The Girl,” he repeated. “Poor Girl!”

It was Gervase’s turn to look at him with keen interest. “It’s odd,” she criticised frankly. “You say such live things that one can hardly believe they’re true, because you say them with such a very dead voice. Thomas was quite right when he said you looked like a Red Indian Chief.”

“Hertha Lampeter says I look like Gerald du Maurier.”

Gervase chuckled. “One only remembers the remarks people make about you, that one either loves or badly hates. *I* know that. So that you can’t really have minded what Hertha said, as much as you thought.”

“Perhaps I badly hated it.”

“Don’t be rude to the head of my profession!”

“Well,” retorted an unusually conceited Dr. Leigh, “don’t be rude to the head of mine.”

And again Gervase chuckled, as though for a swift light-hearted interval, she had forgotten Brooke, forgotten Bernie, forgotten Reg. . . .

A mousy little woman passed them, carefully keeping to the path. She looked a little dazed, as though for a long time she had not been out under the open sky, and her eyes were blinking at the light.

Gervase said: “That’s the landlady of ‘Bannockburn.’”

It was past six o’clock when Alexander finally arrived at the Cliff House, where his mother was very surprised to see him, because he had not announced himself, and

it was very unusual for him to reappear so soon after his holiday down there was over.

"Oh, I thought I'd just run down. It was so hot in London."

Mrs. Leigh glanced at the window. "These heavy rains always remind me of the tropics," she sighed.

"M'yes, don't they? Well, you've had a long spell of heat."

"Your father will be disappointed if it's still raining to-morrow, and he can't go round the links with you. He prefers your game to Bernie's."

"I'm not surprised."

"Alec! You're always so hard on your brother, and he's borne it so wonderfully, all this. I wrote to you about Brooke. And of course it's been all over the papers, too."

"Yes, hasn't it? *Crime passionel*, and all that."

"Do you think," Mrs. Leigh lowered her voice, "do you think he, too, was really in love with that girl? And that's why he killed that dreadful man?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I can't see any other reason." (Dr. Leigh did not say aloud: "It wouldn't be difficult to be in love with that girl.") "Anyhow, I've got a permit to see him to-morrow. I shall have to get up early, and take Lowhampton on my way. So I shouldn't be able to give Father a game, anyhow."

"Oh *dear*—then it was hardly worth while for you to come down at all, for such a short time! Couldn't you have got away from your patients at least a little earlier to-day?"

"I did." thought Dr. Leigh, guiltily. Aloud, he asked where the children were to be found? Christopher?

"Oh, Christopher's busy getting his things ready. You know how he leaves everything till the last moment, and

he goes back to school to-morrow."

"Is he all right?"

"All right? Yes, of course. I think all the children have been particularly well since Dr. Bryant put them on that Bone Extract last year."

Dr. Leigh grunted.

"Don't you, Alec?"

"Yes."

"Sheila grows prettier every day. She's always with the Chaplaynes now. We hardly ever see her." But Sheila's grandmother did not seem in the least offended by this. "Such useful friends, as well as being really extraordinarily nice people!"

"I prophesy," said Dr. Leigh, "that Sheila will marry within the next five years, and it will be an excellent match; and besides that, she'll have the luck to be in love with the man as well; that she'll have two children, a boy and a girl, and never lose her figure; that she'll distinguish herself in international tennis tournaments, and be no trouble to anybody, and a great blessing to all; and that finally, if any of the rest of her family get into a mess, she'll be perfectly sweet about it and very helpful. But she won't notice the mess that they're going to be in, until they're in it."

"What queer things you do say, Alec. I expect Sheila will marry well, yes. But who could get into a mess, as you call it, in our family?"

"Me. Christopher. All Bernie's children. Not Thomas."

"You, Alec? Are you——?"

Alexander laughed, kissed her, and denied any lurking disgrace; assured her that he had not yet been removed from the Register, and ran up to Christopher's room.

Here he was not received as rapturously as of old, but he found nothing to alarm him. Christopher was, indeed, absorbed in school books and football boots; and what questions he put to his uncle and answered rapidly himself, were concerned solely with such orthodox matters.

Alexander, his anxiety set at rest, and thinking it better, since Augs were apparently dormant, not to mention them, went on to the nursery and Thomas.

Thomas was drinking a large glass of milk, and steadily munching Animal Biscuits. He told Alexander exactly what he was going to have for supper when he reached the age to order his own menus, and they had a very good discussion on the matter.

"You can't have three fish courses in the same meal, you see."

"Why not?"

"I don't know why not. Yes, I suppose you can."

"And every sort of cheese there is," finished Thomas, "except the round red soapy kind. There are four sorts of cheese, and that's the only one I don't like."

Nurse, with an indulgent smile, went downstairs.

"Look here," said Thomas, abandoning fish and cheese, "there's no more Society."

Alexander thought that this sounded like an elderly Edwardian lady deploring the modern lack of exclusiveness in drawing-rooms. But he did not wish to confuse Thomas, who would, had he mentioned it, have gone into the matter thoroughly.

"I knew Sheila had quitted, but what are the mortalities since then?"

"There's the photograph girl. She didn't want to stay in directly she heard that Sheila was tired of it."

"Quite," Alexander nodded; the perfect disciple's out-

look; the person, and not the cause. "What about Christopher?"

Thomas recounted how he had meticulously taken the message of Sapphy's resignation to Christopher, and Christopher had stared at him for a moment or two in silence, and then had angrily exclaimed: "Oh, well, let the old Society rip, then! I'm fed up with it, too."

"And then there's you and me," Thomas plodded on, a ring of milk round his mouth.

"What about you and me?"

"Well, we were only half-members, and I don't think we're that, really, any more, do you? Although we haven't done anything special about saying we're not."

"I wasn't a half-member, Thomas."

Thomas said no more, finishing the last but one of his Animal Biscuits. He picked up the last. "What would you say this was, Uncle Alec?"

Alexander examined it doubtfully. It might have been almost anything.

"*Are* there unicorns?" asked Thomas.

"Hallo! Do you read the newspapers?"

"No. Not yet. But everyone's been saying it; I'm not sure why: 'There must be unicorns!' *Are* there, Uncle Alec? Could you draw me one?"

Dr. Leigh drew for him two or three dozen unicorns, while he gave him a short lecture on fabulous zoology.

"Uncle Alec," Thomas as usual reverted to his original point—"Uncle Alec, are there unicorns where the Augs come from? Or is it wrong to be talking about Augs now that we've stopped talking about them?"

"I should think," said Alexander, after some deliberation, "that where the Augs come from is very much the same as where we come from."

"Yes," said Thomas. "I've thought so for a long time."

Cousin Nellie did not join in the inevitable discussion at dinner, on Brooke and the murder and why had Brooke done it, and how long had he been secretly in love with Gervase, and what was his sentence likely to be?

"If this were France," said the Colonel, "he'd have a better chance."

Although the Leigh family were upset at the idea of another resident of Clifford's Bay and one of their friends being so near the gallows, yet they were curiously not so upset as each member had thought either he or the others would be. Perhaps all these years they had really not had as much affection for Brooke as they had taken for granted.

"Whom is he briefing for his defence? Do you know, Alec? His solicitors are Fisher, Axton and Elme."

"No, I don't know. I haven't seen him yet. I've got a permit for to-morrow morning."

"I was wondering if I ought to offer," began Gordon doubtfully, "as he's a friend." But you could see that he was nervous of such a peculiar case, and one in which, to a certain extent, his own family were implicated.

. . . Cousin Nellie was looking happy, Alexander noticed; not just plain happy, but with a special happiness that comes after release from pain. Delectable smiles kept on breaking over her mouth like little pointed waves.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN Brooke's cell, at Lowhampton Gaol, Dr. Leigh had one of the most extraordinary conversations of his forty-one years. Conversation, perhaps, was the wrong word. A conversation between two men implies a dialogue, but this was practically a monologue, even a confession, if you like, except that a confession presupposes repentance, and Brooke was not repentant. On the contrary, Alexander would have said that he was showing a spirit of wholesome cheerfulness, were it not that the word "wholesome" could hardly refer to a gentleman who had just plunged a photographer's property dagger into the ribs of another man. Repentant? Rather he was like a man who for years had successfully kept himself from the drink craving, and now had given way and was glorying in his release. The structure of the face was the same, but nothing else. His bones and body were informed and uplifted by that zest which comes to a liberator who has not the slightest doubt of his cause being right, nor fear of its consequences upon himself.

Briefly, this is what he told Alexander:

About twelve years before, directly after he returned from the war, in fact, and was taking up his job where he had left it off, he fell madly in love with an Aug girl, on a summer holiday in Clifford's Bay. And this infatuation was the beginning, the explanation, and, in a way, the end, of the whole mystery.

Her name was Marge. He gave a curiously vivid picture of her. Marge wore bright cerise and emerald cardigans

over her gingham and piqué dresses; on windy days she tied a scarf round her head instead of a hat. He even described a characteristic but out-of-date gesture, so that Alexander could not refrain from an involuntary mental note that this would have to be recorded in the *Augan*: She would hold a piece of hair at the side of her face with one hand, and then jerkily frizz it up with the other. She was constantly doing this. She evidently had the same sort of glorious vitality that he had already observed among Augs; that cumulative energy of a whole year which exists in this species during their one month of habitation in Clifford's Bay. Those were particularly the years of the dancing craze, and Marge excelled as a dancer.

Amyas Brooke was crazily infatuated.

And she, she wanted a bit of fun.

A bit of fun, she lightly assumed, was her due during her two weeks' holiday. When he plagued her to marry him, she laughed and said: "You're always on at that. Don't let's bother our heads about it!" and that was all she ever gave him. For three summers it went on. During the interim of eleven months and two weeks, he existed in torment, each time hoping that next August it would be different, it would be all right. As for the risk of marrying her—if she had had the devil's brand on her, he would have cared as little. He was possessed by his rage for her, and she gave him no relief and no satisfaction. "You don't know what the rest of my life's like. When I get away I like a bit of fun." By fun she meant slapstick stuff. "You're so serious. Marriage? Who cares? I *don't* think. Come and trip the light fantastic."

Three summers precisely. The fourth year she came back married to one of her own kind. "Well, what did

you expect? I was getting on. Can't leave it for ever, you know. I understand Joe, and he understands me, and that's all there is to it."

Monomania's a queer thing. Queer, too, thought Alexander, that nobody at Clifford's Bay had ever even suspected that on the subject of Augs, Brooke was a monomaniac, who kept this streak in him so repressed that not for an instant could they see it glitter. But now Alexander was reminded again of what he had remembered yesterday in the Park Gardens: the curious facility with which Brooke had leapt at the idea of the Aug game, and contributed his share, that time in his rooms. But his general hatred of the Aug species was tepid, compared with the crusading fierceness that shook him whenever he heard of an Aug of either sex amorously entangled with one of our own class. Gervase? They had all been wrong! Much he cared about Gervase! *Crime passionel?* In love with her? The eternal triangle? Reg his rival? Why, he had hardly noticed her, till the news came that she had thrown over Bernie for the sake of an Aug. Then, silently, Brooke began to listen and watch. So they were, at it again, were they? Gervase was only a symbol, and so, in a way, was Reg. He thought he saw, coming to Gervase from Reg, all the torment, the delay, and the ultimate blow and disillusion that had happened to himself from Marge.

The next thing that had possibly galvanised Brooke's old phobia, so Dr. Leigh diagnosed the psychological process, was being brought into actual physical contact with an Aug when Gervase had taken Reg to see him. Probably this was the first time that such contact had happened to him since he had been jilted by Marge. He must have seen plenty of them about, but had managed

to avoid them, and they did not ever consult him professionally. Reg, who must have been very like Marge in vitality and physical beauty, might furthermore have added to this upheaval by his obvious admiration of Brooke, which would have the effect of making the latter feel sadistic and powerful: "I suspect, too, he had been living too much alone. None of us became very intimate with him, and he seemed to have no relations. And if he repressed all his normal instincts after the Marge business . . . God, though, what an actor the man was, not to allow any of us a glimpse of what was going on down in the murk! Of course, I didn't see him often, but even then—" But Dr. Leigh had known of other cases where a man's secret life of reverie and phobia had been completely at variance with what he allowed to appear superficially for the benefit of the people surrounding him.

Finally, Brooke had heard from Alexander, that day on the golf-links, that Gervase was determined to marry Reg and go over to the enemy; no careless impermanent affair, but marriage. The jealousy which seized and twisted him then was so overlaid with what Brooke himself believed to be altruistic motives for crime, that he probably never recognised it for jealousy, at all. Another victory for the Augs! And his tormented madness leaped into a conviction that he must take action. One Gervase after another would follow the first Gervase, lured by the treacherous vitality and physical attraction of Reg after Reg, Marge after Marge. . . .

But all that mattered, in the deeper motive which he did not examine so self-righteously, was that Reg was faithful to Gervase, where Marge had jilted Brooke; that Reg and Gervase would lie in a marriage bed, while Brooke had lain alone for twelve years.

There is no type so likely to be successful in carrying out intention as a single-minded man; Brooke spoke to no one of what he was going to do. His mania had become homicidal. He was going to kill Reg.

Alexander asked Brooke why he had not killed him then, in the dental chair. One could not have a man more helplessly at one's mercy. Look at Nathaniel Cooper! And Brooke grinned impishly at that memory.

"Poor Cooper! And yet I expect he's dined out on his experience. Well, I don't know, Leigh; perhaps you'll half understand me when I say that as he'd come to me professionally——"

Yes, Dr. Leigh half understood him. In fact, wholly understood him. Reg had come to Brooke, not to be murdered, but to have a tooth stopped; and Brooke was an excellent dentist. He was compelled to stop that tooth with the greatest skill he had, though it must have given him sardonic pleasure to reflect that Reg would not long have the use of it.

Still more amusing was the next development of the situation, when Reg, amazed at his almost painless transition to a region freed from pain, viewed his deliverer as Man Friday might have viewed Robinson Crusoe; as the lion of the legend viewed Androcles. He wanted to be pals with Brooke, to knock about with him on equal terms; at the same time, metaphorically, to sit at his feet and worship. Brooke had only to stroll up to him the next night on the pier, in what looked like a genial mood, and Reg instantly threw off the rest of his companions, with a careless promise to join them later, and yielded himself enthusiastically to Brooke's proffered company. A thoroughly friendly person himself, he must have been delighted at seeing the quiet surgeon throw off his re-

ticence and show himself ready for any Saturday night lark that might present itself.

Brooke's plan was to lure Reg to the steps at the very end of the pier; and there, as quiet and opportunity offered, to engage him in a quarrel, clap a pad of chloroform over his mouth so that he should not cry out in time to summon help, and push him down the slippery steps into the water.

Meanwhile, till he could get him down to the steps, the more he could gain Reg's confidence by playing up to his ideas of what a boon companion should be, the better. Reg's ideas of fun were elementary in the extreme. They fooled round a bit with penny-in-the-slot machines: "They're pretty sinister at night; sinister and futile at the same time. But for Augs, they're grand entertainment, neither sinister nor futile. Have you noticed, Leigh, that Augs always get their damned pennies back, and we always lose them? Oh, they're strong . . . Dusty fortune-tellers wait in glass cases, grinning and frustrated, for the spasm of jerky life which a penny will give them; my hat, didn't they promise Reg the earth and the stars!"

Brooke was curiously obsessed by the penny-in-the-slot machines along the pier. He dwelt on the subject in greater detail than seemed important; perhaps with the knowledge that death was waiting for them both, his own a few weeks later than Reg's, but death for both, they deeply dented his consciousness, instead of only laying grotesque scratches on it, as would have been the case at a more normal time. Alexander visualised him and Reg rolling arm-in-arm gaily from one machine to another, always nearer to the end of the pier; while cricketers, hopelessly handicapped by stiff elbows, played a game of despair with a ball which almost immediately

disappeared into a hole in the ground; while houris dressed in decaying silk and spangles promised that success would be won within the twelve-month, if only shyness were overcome; while, with two teams set in motion, they played against each other in the Great Polo Game. "Pathetic, isn't it, Leigh? that the Augs' only knowledge of polo should be from a closed glass box on the pier?" And Alexander thought again how queer that Brooke, planning the murder of an Aug, should yet be able to spare a side-thought for the pity of his exclusion from the careless, expensive sports.

"We had one penny left between us; so when we came to the last two, I let Reg choose, and, of course, the stout fellow plumped for the British Execution." Brooke described the British Execution; and for the first and only time during that morning's interview, his voice ran off its even line and took a swerve into hysteria. After the British Execution, they were at the dark and silent end of the pier, whither Brooke had been steering his victim; but here he met with a check. Leaning over the rail by the steps and listening to the faint, oily swish of waves below, he suddenly heard a human voice speaking from the cave under the boards. The voice said dreamily: "Ma'll be wondering," and then no more.

"Oo-er!" remarked Reg. "Bit of canoodling going on. Let's go down and give 'em a fright."

Brooke had to discourage this. He had no desire for witnesses. To hell with these lovers—he knew their ways! They would not move or speak for hours, and Ma would go on wondering.

"Oh, leave them alone!" Brooke said. "Aren't we going to join your pals at the 'Unicorn'? Rotten pub, the 'Unicorn.'" This was his first move to a quarrel. He

remembered that there was another flight of steps farther up the pier, and perhaps no "canoodling" couples to interfere.

Reg contended, still good-humouredly, that the "Unicorn" was the best pub. in Clifford's Bay.

Quarrels are unexpected things. You expect them to break out Nor'-Nor'-West, and suddenly you find that a quarrel is raging due South-East of your intention. Not, then, on the quality of the beer at the local inn, but on the question of whether the unicorn was or was not a fabulous beast, did the discussion spring up. Puzzling as was his reaction to such a far-removed subject, Reg was furious at the notion that there was no such thing as a unicorn. He even contended that he had seen one somewhere, he could not exactly remember where. In reply to Brooke's argument that were there unicorns, surely a specimen could be seen at the Zoo, he retorted that Zoo or no Zoo, he *had* seen one somewhere.

"Don't be such a bloody fool!" he shouted. "There *must* be unicorns!"

Good. He was getting angry. Brooke managed to draw him slowly along to the other lonelier steps. Presently, harping on the unicorn note, they might come to wrestling. Brooke's hand felt for the pad in his pocket. But as they passed the door of Dripp's Carnival Studio, Reg's volatile mind lost interest in the unicorns; he suggested, wholly affable again, that they should break into the photographer's hut, dark and locked-up, and make hay among his properties; dress up, perhaps, and frighten the crowd that would come pouring out of the pavilion at the end of the Humble Servants' Concert. Reg would be a clergyman and harangue them dismally on the follies of pleasure, and Brooke was to dress as a Salvation Army

lass, with bonnet and tambourine. Reg threw back his head and roared with laughter at the mere idea.

Boisterously Brooke agreed.

Alexander was still trying to visualise the Amyas Brooke known to the residents of Clifford's Bay, capering through this evening of incongruous pranks, with murder in his heart. He seemed to be enjoying his dangerous confession. There was relish in his voice; not melodrama, but relish, and he had, in a mysterious way, acquired power since they had last met and played golf.

In the Dripp studio, Brooke let Reg take lead. It was a happy hunting-ground for Reg; palms and draperies, weapons and costumes and guitars and gilt chairs. He plunged about among the costumes, tumbling hats off shelves, pulling the dirty costumes from the pegs from which they dangled limply and forlornly. Best of all, from Reg's point of view, were the grotesque back-cloths through which Augs loved to poke their heads to be photographed. One of them represented two fat bathers inconvenienced by a crab; another, an airman in an aeroplane; another, a hunting scene; a fourth, two plump and naked cupids flying over the trees. Reg said: "I'll tell you what, shove your head through that one, and I'll photograph you."

Brooke pushed his head through the aperture above the cupid's body; the canvas was not very tight round his face and hands, but he had a curious feeling of helplessness, which he realised was from the fact that his lateral vision was cut off by the screen; he could see nothing but what was directly in front of him—which happened to be a hypnotising notice saying: "PUT ON YOUR BEST SMILE AND YOUR PHOTOGRAPH IS SURE TO BE A SUCCESS!"

"My turn next!" said Reg, not unskilfully busying himself with the camera. "What a wheeze! Jerry'll sleep with this under her pillow. I'll call in to-morrow and pay the old codger for the mess I've made."

And then Brooke knew what chance was giving him.

"Some men there are, love not a gaping pig;
Some, that are mad if they behold a cat;
And others, when the bagpipe sings i' the nose,
Cannot contain their urine: for affection,
Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood
Of what it likes, or loathes."

He cared not at all that he would shortly be tried for murder.

"I shall plead Not Guilty, of course," he added carelessly.

"Not Guilty? But, my dear fellow, that photograph which was found in the camera was pretty damning evidence. I can't make out, if you wanted to conceal your identity, why you didn't remove the plate and destroy it before you left the studio that night. From your own account, you were pretty cool."

"I didn't want to conceal my identity. At least, I didn't care if they found out or not, who did it. Why should I bother? The main thing was that what had to be done, was done."

Alexander reflected that one did not discuss monomania with a monomaniac, so he merely remarked that if that were the case, if he didn't care that he were found out, where was the sense in saying just now that he would plead Not Guilty?

"I said," retorted Brooke quietly and distinctly, "that I was Not Guilty of murder. It is not *murder* to kill an Aug."

"My God, Brooke! You can't make *that* your defence!"

"Can't I? Why not?"

* * * * *

"That you, Gordon?"

"Yes . . . Hallo, Alec. What's up? Are you back in town?"

"No. I'm in a call-office at Lowhampton. Listen, Gordon, can you hear me? I don't want to shout."

"Yes . . . What is it? What's wrong?"

"You said something last night about offering to defend Brooke. Well, give up the idea. Don't touch the case."

"Good God! Why? You've seen him, haven't you?"

"Yes, I've seen him. He's mad. . . . No, I mean literally. It'll come out at the trial, and he'll be put away. Don't tell Mother, or any of them. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXV

ALEXANDER's warning to his brother proved superfluous. Brooke, according to his solicitors, Messrs. Fisher, Axton and Elme, had refused even to consider the notion of briefing a barrister to conduct his defence; had said that it was a clear case, and he was going to conduct it himself. He refused even to give his solicitors an idea of the lines on which this defence was to be made out. Messrs. Fisher, Axton and Elme were extremely puzzled by their client's attitude, and rather irritated.

"If I have not said too much, Dr. Leigh, I should complain that as a firm we are handicapped by our own client. His behaviour grows more peculiar, if I am not saying too much."

Alexander wondered why solicitors always seemed to have the fidgets over having said too much. "They have a Trappist fixation," he remarked to Gordon. "Why is it?"

But Gordon immediately became professionally loyal and changed the subject. He was always very careful, when he was with Alexander, never to refer to the mysterious telephone conversation. So until the trial, which came on early in January, no one but Dr. Leigh actually knew what the accused was going to explode upon Clifford's Bay and the world.

When Messrs. Fisher, Axton and Elme suddenly threw up the case and informed Brooke that they could not act for him, shortly before the trial, following a conference so private that there is no word in the English language to denote that degree of privacy, Alexander gathered that

Messrs. Fisher, Axton and Elme had a glimmering of Brooke's fanatical line of defence, and had immediately decided to sever connection.

Then came the trial. It hardly lasted long enough to be called a trial. The Press, of course, began working up beforehand to their favourite Eternal Triangle theory. They had put that pudding away hot, and they brought it out again cold, but it was the same pudding: Brooke, Gervase, Reg. Brooke loved Gervase (secretly); Gervase loved Reg (openly); Gervase broke off her engagement with Captain Bernard Leigh (inset). Brooke murdered Reg. We can't have that, you know! The usefulness of the Gervase figure in this triangle was so obvious to the Press that the *Daily Special* even spared a thought for the girl herself, and made enquiries as to where she was living, what she was doing and so forth, pending her appearance as the most picturesque witness. But Gervase at that time was in too miserable a mood to accept notoriety, however advantageous. Her life-force was suspended, waiting for the trial, dreading it. She was living meanwhile in a scrambled ménage with two friends, an unmarried couple whom she was supposed to be chaperoning, in a small flat just beyond Battersea Bridge. Gervase slept, not too well, on the divan in the sitting-room, and the chaperoned pair occupied the only other room in the flat.

* * * * *

"... Guilty, if you like, of killing Reg Black. Not Guilty of Murder!

"You, Residents of Clifford's Bay, have all recognised the danger that exists. Your attitude has been timid and pacific. Your attitude has been pusillanimous and contemptible! I am not here to defend my own life. If I had

been concerned with that, I might not have been so careless in leaving behind this clue and that clue to my identity. What I care about is to make you all see that during your years of silence and propitiation, the peril has swollen and grown strong, till now at last we can only save ourselves by the most stalwart outspoken line of action.

"I stand here accused of murdering Reg Black. But Reg Black himself was plotting murder. That girl—what is her name?—Gervase Goldacre—that girl was infatuated. She would have married him! And you, her fellow human beings, in your damnable conspiracy of silence, would have been content to let her go, while you murmured your good wishes—you would have dared make no separate and no concerted attempt to save her!

"She *has* been saved. Yet, if you have your way, other men and women, other girls and boys, the children even, of Clifford's Bay will from their very birth be given no protection against the menace; but, on the contrary, be told lie after lie, simply because you are afraid of the truth—*afraid!* Propitiation, non-resistance, hypocrisy—these are the shameful words on the banners you carry.

"White banners! *White flags!*

"I have no personal hatred of this man I killed. I did not even dislike him. The man, like the girl, is only a symbol. Their romance, stripped of its orthodox brushwork and colours, of its sickly pretty decoration, was no romance, but a stark omen. Can you not rouse up now, and at last admit the perilous convention which is swaddling and swathing the truth? If I can feel that I have smashed a hole in the smooth wall of that convention, smashed a hole and left a gap that can never again be filled up, then there is no sentence you can pronounce

on me that will not be the purest joy! For it is not in hating and fighting us that these are the enemies of Clifford's Bay. They are more insidious than that. It is because they admire us; because they enjoy mingling with us; it is because they imitate and love us; it is because they would finally and triumphantly succeed in identifying their lives with our lives.

"Who can say where it may end, this simple, this diabolically cunning desire of theirs to mingle, to intermarry, to encroach? Who can say where it may end? Am I addressing a town of simpletons? These people are *not* the same as we are. They are *not* the same, they are *not* the same!"

—Here he was stopped. One might have thought that it would have been apparent before, that the man was unhinged; but he had begun his speech quietly enough, and probably astonishment had kept the court listening—astonishment and a natural inability to understand a word of what he was raving about.

Alexander, reading the comments of the papers that evening and next morning, smiled a little grimly at their painstaking attempts to find a streak of sense through all that truculent nonsense; to interpret the phobia, whatever it was, and draw from it some sage, psychological precepts. He believed that even now they would gladly have kept up the idea that love had driven Brooke mad, but for the sincerely careless way in which he pronounced Gervase's name in his speech, at first forgetting it.

He could not help being rather glad that Brooke, poor devil, had not actually used the word "Aug." It would have given him a queer twinge to have heard the children's word trumpeted publicly from the mouth of

a man who had committed murder, and stood on the brink of being put away for an infinite number of years: ("We call them Augs for short, and you'll find it a very convenient name when you've used it two or three times.")

Dr. Leigh was furthermore upset, though he informed himself austere-ly that he might have foreseen it, at the swift transference of Gervase into the Sunday Press, the music-halls and the fickle heart of the great British Public. "MY MURDERED FIANCÉ," a flamboyant article by the Girl Who Was Loved by Reg Black, was slashed across the double page of the *Sunday Monger*, animated with illustrations and hectic with headlines: "How I Took My Lover to the Murderer's Den—(tal chair)."—"He's a Splendid Chap; didn't Hurt me a Bit!"

The next step of her career was not difficult to prophesy: an expensive engagement at the Amphitheatre Music-Hall, three performances daily, packed to the very exits—for who would miss seeing the girl who had been hugged by Reg Black? She sang a song specially written for her and for the occasion:

"There must be unicorns,
There must be love!"

The lesser satellites of the case, as well as the blazing stars, were offered every opportunity to twinkle where they could be seen twinkling at reasonable prices. Nathaniel Cooper, for instance. A resourceful news-reel editor realised that the man who had sat in the dentist's chair during the arrest of Brooke was undoubtedly of entertainment value.

. . . After a caption: "The Man in the Dentist's Chair," Nathaniel was shown in his own home. The camera pre-

sented his garden; the hen-houses he had put up himself; his favourite hen; his old father; close-up of his father's teeth; his little daughter: "Called Thalia, because that was the nearest we could get to my own name, Nathaniel." Then followed a dialogue in Nathaniel's own study, between himself and the young film-interviewer lately down from Oxford, in which poor Nathaniel had been carefully rehearsed in his jokes, so that he could not use his own idiom, and was nervous about the speech provided for him:

"Tell me, Mr. Cooper, how did you feel at the precise moment when the police entered the room to make their arrest?"

"At first I thought it was an answer to prayer; my tooth had been drilled for ten minutes without interruption." (Laughter.) "Then I realised that I shouldn't have to pay the bill, for, in the words of the poet, men may come, and men may go, but Brooke had gone for ever!" (Much laughter.)

The residents of Clifford's Bay were naturally embarrassed at being adjured so conspicuously by a mad dentist in front of judge, jury, journalists, and, by virtue of the Press, the whole country, to rise up and get something done. Brooke's spectacular oration made them shudder. Some of them, indeed, left it unread, and only heard about it at second-hand. Miss Picton-Porter, manfully ramming it down the throats of the Jennings, was a not-unedifying sight. Yet, recovering from the shock of being dragged into the limelight by a lunatic, and that lunatic their own dentist, the residents began to discover, in the actual substance of his speech, concealed beneath its wayward distortions and rhetorical extravagances, a

germ of sincere local patriotism. The Leighs, especially, responded to an undoubted revelation of sense and sanity in one or two of the phrases: "It is because they enjoy mingling with us; it is because they imitate and love us; it is because they would finally and triumphantly succeed in identifying their lives with our lives." . . . "The peril has swollen and grown strong, till now at last we can only save ourselves by the most stalwart, outspoken line of action."

Had they not always detested the Aug invasion—the awful popularity of Clifford's Bay as a summer resort? Had they not withdrawn themselves as much as possible from contamination? Yes, indeed, but their policy had been resentment without resistance. They had allowed the Augs to kill their sons, steal their sons' fiancées, wreck their daughters' chances of marrying, and drive their dentists mad.

Brooke was mad, yes. He was past help. He had had to be put away, poor fellow. There was no appeal against that. But the sane residents of Clifford's Bay grew thoughtful over the fragment of speech he had been allowed to deliver, before he was finally silenced; then, growing bolder and following the lead from the Cliff House, they began to say: "Perhaps we've let the thing run on too long." They began to say: "After all, this *is* our town, not *Theirs*." They said: "It's simply disgusting that one should be at the mercy of Goths and Vandals who are at liberty to pile up their damned banana-skins over every inch of the country! It makes my blood boil!" They began to say, in effect, if not in words: "Clifford's Bay for the Residents, and Clear Out the Augs!"

Following the Leighs of the Cliff House, these were the proposed measures to consolidate a dream, discussed

first round the dinner-table when the men were left alone; and on the golf-links; and in the drawing-rooms where the women were left alone; then carried to Boards, Committees, Associations, Leagues and Councils:

The local licensing laws were to be altered, so that no person could obtain a drink containing any percentage of alcohol, until he had been resident in Clifford's Bay for one month.

All music and dancing licences and hawking licences already granted were to become void, and new ones granted only on very much stricter terms.

No games were to be played in the Clifford's Bay Park Gardens.

Bathing was to be allowed on one beach alone; and only from the tents or bathing-huts, for the use of which 1/- was to be charged. In addition to this, there would be a charge of sixpence to enter the bathing-beach (which would be railed off all round), and the most rigorous censorship of bathing-costumes was to be enforced by a Committee who would regularly patrol this beach.

Anyone detected leaving a paper bag or an apple-core or more serious litter anywhere out-of-doors within the Borough would be liable to heavy penalties.


The Esplanade Hotel would display a large notice announcing "NO CHARABANCS"; and the smaller hotels, following its lead, promised to do the same.

Nothing need be done yet. This was only January, far away from August. Towards Whitsun, perhaps; after Easter. . . . "By Jove, they're not going to find us, this year, lying down like a lot of mugs, while they do what they like!"

The Leighs thought that they were being leaders in this

new offensive. They managed to forget that they had contented themselves with grumbling and inactivity until a madman had galvanised their hatred from the supine into the vertical. The residents were becoming intoxicated by their own awakened aggression. Every now and then in social history, a town is ripe and ready for some conversion; and the great anti-Aug crusade in Clifford's Bay, following the trial of Amyas Brooke for the murder of Reg Black, was no exception. Feeling spread like a forest fire at the end of a drought. To a certain extent one half of the town, the resident half, went berserk. The other, the progressive half, opposed them violently. The manager of the Pier and the editor of the local paper were brothers-in-law, and could not be expected to show what Colonel Leigh would call patriotic feeling in the matter of expelling the Augs, or rather, of making Clifford's Bay so entangled with prohibitions and empty of attractions ("cheap attractions," said Colonel Leigh), that after one unsuccessful attempt, They would return no more.

"Let 'em go somewhere else for a change. We've had enough. There are limits to what a man's going to put up with when he's lived twenty-five years in a place!"



CHAPTER XXVI

It was on about January 20th that Dr. Leigh received the letter from his Cousin Nellie, which immediately brought him down to the Cliff House. He had not visited his people for some time. There had been too much to do; and in November, his mistress had intimated that she would like him to come to Scotland for a brief holiday. And then, after Brooke's trial, he had felt somehow that he did not want to discuss the whole business any more with his family. So it was quite simple to stay away. He wondered, now, what was wrong. Cousin Nellie's letter, begging for his presence, had been agitated enough to warrant the notion that something very definitely was wrong, and it was not merely the pleasure of his company which she desired.

"We might go for a little walk," she suggested, coming forward from under the tall hedge by the front garden gate, when he drove up. She must have been waiting there for some time, so as to get hold of him before the family were aware of his unexpected arrival. "You could take your car somewhere and leave it, perhaps."

Alexander obeyed her. They walked for a short way along the esplanade, very blowy and deserted at that time of year, and then sat down in a shelter: "Where we can hear ourselves talk," she said, trotting beside him a little breathlessly. He thought she was not looking nearly as comely and pink as when he had last seen her in September.

He asked her gently what was worrying her, and

why she had sent for him?

"It's Christopher." She produced from her large bumpy handbag a drawing which she handed to Alexander trustfully, and waited for it to explain what she felt would be, on the whole, too difficult for her.

The drawing had obviously been influenced by the *Punch* patriotic cartoonists. Even so, Alexander was surprised at the spirited way Christopher—for it was boldly signed—had achieved his effect. There was a large symbolic lady with fine hips, in a flowing Greek tunic, flowing hair, and a castle on her head, representing Clifford's Bay, nobly brandishing a broom and indicating with her other arm some broken-down loose-boxes behind her. "LET US CLEAN OUT THIS AUGEAN STABLE!" was the caption in printed letters underneath.

Dr. Leigh frowned, remained silent for some time. Then he said, speaking more to himself than to Cousin Nellie: "For *The Augan*, I suppose. I'd no idea this was still going on."

"It's been going on ever since the trial. That dreadful speech. . . . And then Cousin Robert and all his friends down here getting so worked up against the—the August visitors. Christopher's so over-excitable, and now he doesn't seem able to think or talk of anything else, though of course he has to talk of other things to people who don't know anything about his queer idea. He comes to me a great deal, and goes on so fast and says such wild things, I'm not at all sure if he ought to go back to school next week. And then when he brought me this drawing—it was appalling that a child should feel like that about people who'd done him no harm. As though—as though—and to use the word 'stables'—*dirty* stables!" Now that she had begun, Nellie seemed able to ease her mind of all

its burden in one outburst of fine indignation: "He can't help it, at his age. He only echoes what's going on round him. I never believed that human beings *could* be so vile and snobbish! There's a poem, I don't suppose you know it; I don't, except for one line: 'Write me as one who loves his fellow-men.' But this isn't loving your fellow-men, is it, Cousin Alec?"

He knew she was thinking of her friend Lou Black, but for the moment he had to lead her back to the subject of Christopher.

"How is it that he talks to you about it? I didn't know that you ever——"

"Oh yes, indeed. I don't know what you'll think of me, Cousin Alec. I'm very much ashamed of myself," but she couldn't help smiling a little, even in her distress, at the memory of her own naïve credulity. "But for a week and a day, yes, a week and a day it was, because I remember I heard from Lou on the Tuesday evening, after she had left on the Sunday night, so she wrote almost directly she reached home, which, considering everything, poor Reg—You can't imagine what a relief it was to get her address! And then, of course, I realised what a goose I'd been. But for a week and a day I'd almost allowed myself to wonder if there could be any truth in what Christopher had told me about Augs: that they weren't the same as us, you know, but a different race who lived in strange places, or didn't live at all—I got muddled about this—and only invaded Clifford's Bay once a year, and got stronger and stronger and liked cream. It's true, Lou *did* like cream, but, of course, that doesn't mean anything."

"When did Christopher let you in for all this?"

After she had explained the details, Alexander remained for a while silent. He was trying to gauge how much of

this was his responsibility. Yet even dealing with himself pretty drastically, he could not see that he had begun to be culpable, either for stupidity or neglect, until, perhaps, his last interview with Christopher; then, indeed, he might have seen that every single word of his denial of the Augs as a separate race had been rejected by the boy, whose imagination by that time must have shot beyond overtaking.

Nellie, meanwhile, beside Alexander, was also absorbed in spinning a not too pleasant tapestry of thoughts. She had not told Lou yet of the state of feeling in Clifford's Bay against summer visitors. How *could* she tell Lou? Lou would be so dreadfully hurt. And especially, how could she tell Lou when that feeling and most of the suggested measures, insulting beyond all words, emanated from the Cliff House, her own relations with whom she lived? And suppose they actually materialised, these schemes for making the August visitors at first unwelcome, and then barring them altogether—what was she to write to Lou then? Mrs. Black, it is true, had said they would never return to Clifford's Bay, but they might change their minds. The associations were sad enough and dreadful enough to keep the mother away, but Lou had promised that she would come. For, after all, it wasn't the place's fault that poor Reg—— And she and Lou had had such happy times, and were going to have such happy times again. Nellie trembled all over when she thought of the injustice and unreason of all she had had to listen to, especially at meal-times, up at the Cliff House, since Mr. Brooke's speech. Oh, poor Mr. Brooke! But still, his girl might have jilted him, even had she not been one of the summer visitors at Clifford's Bay. Had not Gervase Goldacre jilted Bernie? But that, too, went somehow against

the Augs in the Leigh household. "LET US CLEAN OUT THIS AUGEAN STABLE!"

"Look here," said Alexander's voice, beaten rather thin with anxiety, "look here, what are we to do? I shall have to talk to Christopher, of course. But will it do any good?"

Cousin Nellie shook her head. "I'm afraid not. He'll just think you've gone over to the other side, not because you don't believe all you've ever told him, but because you've begun to believe that it isn't right for him to have been told so much. Do you see what I mean, Cousin Alec? He'll think it's just because of his age. He doesn't know the difference any more between what's imagination and what isn't. I've never known there were imaginations like Christopher's. I think it's a good deal to do with being left to think about it all alone."

"Damn Sheila," remarked Sheila's uncle, "why couldn't she have stopped where I put her?" But in fairness he knew that Sheila's enthusiasm for a while, and then her sudden boredom and departure in quest of fresh experiences, were more in the nature of a child than Christopher's furious tenacity.

"He says," Cousin Nellie went on, "that in the summer there's going to be a real war in Clifford's Bay, and the Cliff House will be fortified, and already boats are secretly bringing in cargoes of ammunition and barbed-wire, and that Mr. Brooke has only been shut up for the time, as a sort of curtain for what's really going on, but in the summer he's to be made Grand Marshal of the Army of Defence."

"Oh, hell!" groaned Alexander.

"And he believes it all."

Alexander repeated: "What *are* we to do?" Not that he supposed that his little Cousin Nellie could possibly

have any constructive ideas on the subject.

So that all the shocks he had received during recent months were as nothing compared with the shock of hearing her suggest calmly: "The only way to cure Christopher, of course, would be to send him up to stay with the Blacks for a nice long visit. Then he'd see for himself that there was no difference between them and us. Except in the same way that everybody's different from everybody else." Then she blushed deeply. "Why are you looking at me like that, Cousin Alec? I'm not a doctor, I know, but have I said anything silly?"

"No, my God, you haven't!"

She realised that the look in his eyes had been of respect, and blushed still more, and thought how very, very nice he was, and how very, very easy to talk to, because he saw at once what you meant. And how very, very much nicer, though perhaps it was ungrateful of her, than the rest of his family.

Yes, thought Alexander, diagnosis was one thing, but cure was another. Undoubtedly she had hit upon the only way to remove young Christopher's fixed idea: break it up against reality, let reality remove it without any forced wrenches. It simply could not fail. From what he had seen of the Black family—and he smiled, remembering the day of the expedition to the caves—there were no reasons on earth, except the wrong ones, why Christopher should not be sent to stay with them. Interrupt his schooling? But he certainly could not go back to school in the state that Cousin Nellie had described. If not dealt with immediately, the child would undoubtedly reach a crisis in his life of fantasy, and then drop over into neurotic depression on the further side.

"What a pity it's quite impossible," Cousin Nellie's re-

gretful tones broke into his reflections.

"Impossible?" He frowned. "Why impossible?"

"My dear Cousin Alec, can you see your family—your mother and father, and especially the children's father—if we walk in now and say we've arranged for Christopher to go up and stay with the Blacks? You don't know the state they're in."

"Is nobody sane just now?" exclaimed Dr. Leigh irritably, realising the utter, miserable truth in what she had said. Not that he objected to a fight; not that he objected to springing a mine under the family feet. But what authority had he, compared with Gordon, over Christopher's movements?

"All the same, they'll have to be brought round to it," he pronounced grimly.

"Well, I'll write to Lou meanwhile and get it all fixed up, so that if you can manage to get the family's permission, there need be nothing to wait for."

"You're very confident that he'll be welcome, aren't you?"

"Oh yes. Dear Lou will manage it all, and the Blacks are the soul of hospitality. They'll be delighted. Lou's often said that Christopher was just the right age for Len."

"Supposing it were the other way round?" He felt ashamed, somehow, for his own family. They were not appearing in very shining colours at any stage of the conversation. "Supposing Miss Lou Black wrote to you and said Len was suffering from nerves and they thought it would do him good to come and stay at the Cliff House for a nice long visit, what do you think my mother and father and my sister and brothers would reply to that? Not to mention Nurse," he added in parenthesis.

Cousin Nellie urged her imagination towards such an

announcement, made under such circumstances, by herself to the Leighs; shrank and grew pale. "Yes, but then you see, it's never been that way round. It only works one way. The Augs live, but the residents don't let live. Ever since I first arrived I noticed Cousin Robert and Cousin Violet were prejudiced in one or two ways, though it took me a long time to discover exactly what it was, and even when your father talked to me about—about—Well, even when he talked to me very seriously one day, I didn't understand that he was only warning me that it was not quite the right thing to go paddling with Lou among the crowds on the beach in August. Though if he'd asked me not to, straight out, I'm afraid I should still have done it. Because I can't see any harm—— And now I should do it on purpose, and even if I didn't enjoy it at all, because now it's worse than prejudice. Only the Augs have never felt it from *their* side—never, not for one moment. They'd always have been delighted to be friends with any of the residents. Though they didn't mind that they weren't."

"The Augs?" asked Alexander, mildly teasing her. "You, too?"

She blushed again: "It's such a convenient name. As long as one doesn't mean it."

Himself; and then the children; Sapphy; Brooke; Gervase; now Cousin Nellie—who had almost been led to believe for a week and a day, funny little soul, that her friend had belonged to a mysterious race who were not, properly speaking, human at all. There was no end to the victims of his family's obsession. He and Nellie and all the others had found their own way out, but Christopher——

Was Christopher any less sane than Brooke? But were his parents any more sane than Christopher? The child

had childishly materialised their conception of the Augs, into physical differences and magic, that was all.

"I think we'll go home now, if you don't mind. I should like to get off my letter to Lou before the post goes out this evening; then it's done, isn't it?"

"Yes, then that part of it is done."

CHAPTER XXVII

CHRISTOPHER's welcome of Alexander had again been perfunctory. Nor did he appear to be paying any attention to the conversation at the dinner-table that evening.

"You're a pretty problem," reflected his uncle. And disturbed as he was by Cousin Nellie's information, he reflected that he would probably be still more disturbed if he had any power to divine what was at that very moment whirling through Christopher's mind:

"A host of furious fancies
Whereof I am commander——"

No, better not think of that. Tom o' Bedlam's song.

Nellie's plan had a quality of the divine. It was colossal, wholly without flaw, if the family could be brought round to consent. But Alexander felt as though he were setting out to conquer a walled Tibetan city with no other weapon than a cabbage-stalk.

"You're very absent-minded, Alec."

He roused himself, not sorry to escape from his latest self-infliction, which was that he should have suspected, when Thomas announced Christopher's reception of the death of the Society, that it was not natural for Christopher to have let go so easily. His perception must have been out of condition that September evening; blunted and opaque. Perhaps if he had arrived at the Cliff House without first seeing Gervase slip like a shadow into the Park Gardens. . . .

The Leighs had not seen Alexander since Brooke's trial,

three weeks ago, and had therefore a great deal to say about it. They asked him if it were not a very painful exhibition?

"Two of the Lampeters insisted on going. Did you see them, Alec? We all thought it was—well, indecent is not a very nice word, but really, for delicately brought-up girls like that——"

"I always liked poor Hertha best of the three; she cried all day and said she didn't know what had possessed her sisters."

"Well, I don't know, Sybil, old thing, you must try and be more tolerant, you know. Kate Lampeter said to me afterwards: 'I wouldn't have gone, Bernie, but I did feel, and so did Dora, that it would help poor Mr. Brooke to see us there.'"

"And did it?" asked Alexander, still absently.

But Bernie thought that, as usual, his brother was being sarcastic at his expense, and pulled his moustache and said: "Easy enough to make fun of a kind impulse, but——"

"Do you think they'll ever release him, Alec?"

Twisting through Alexander's mind were the words "Brooke—Grand Marshal——"

Suddenly a plan of action showed itself. The family might agree to the visit to the Blacks, if they could see for themselves what they would probably never believe at third-hand, if they could see for themselves that "host of furious fancies." Suppose, then, now and at once, deliberately, he sought to bring on a demonstration in front of them all? Drastic, and not very scrupulous, but it was urgent that the boy's illusion should be drained away with as little violence as possible.

So he said, wondering ironically whether his Cousin Nellie would think that he had gone mad, too, or whether

she would guess what he was about: "I don't know. It may have been just a blind, to have put him into the asylum." And he felt, without looking, that Christopher, sitting opposite him, had lifted his round, black head sharply.

"A blind?" exclaimed the Colonel. "What do you mean, a blind?"

"If he hadn't been put away, you see, sir, on a pretext of madness, but had come down here again, Clifford's Bay would have treated him very much as a hero, wouldn't they? And that wouldn't have done at all, from the point of view of law and order."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I've heard rumours," began Alexander.

(Was that enough?)

Christopher burst into the conversation like a rocket dripping stars. His impact was so vehement that not one of his elders told him at once to hold his tongue, for little boys mustn't talk nonsense.

Presently horror kept them quiet.

He described, with the authority of one who has no doubts as to the truth, how from the beginning, before Brooke's trial, all through the night and early morning, a strange procession had gathered, streaming in from Clifford's Bay towards Lowhampton, as though drawn by an invisible bidding that they could hear most clearly because it was most vital to their lives. The Brigade ("The Propitiators," thought Alexander, his mind racing for a second towards Gervase), the men and women who served the Augs during the summer season. They were in costume, and carrying their emblems: clowns, with portable pianos on their backs; nigger minstrels with black faces and banjos; concert-parties, each in their motley; dance-orchestras with saxophone and trap-drums;

ice-cream, winkle and cockle-men with barrows and banners; landladies in capes and bonnets, carrying shopping-bags; boys with donkeys and boys with goat-carriages; guides with peaked caps; charabanc guides with megaphones; pedlars with trays of souvenirs; deck-chair-men with rolls of tickets; bath-chair-men with bath-chairs; railway porters with trolleys; outside porters with barrows; beach photographers with their tripods; lighting artists with easels; boarding-house and lodging-house slaveys with pails and brooms; lady entertainers with packets of progressive whist scoring-cards; bathing-hut attendants with towels; balloon and kite and dough-nut and greengage vendors with their wares; waiters in greasy tail-coats; waitresses with perky white caps; pier officials and men who run pleasure-steamers, dressed like sailors. . . .

They did not wait in silence for the verdict of the jury. "Not Guilty!" they shouted in chorus over and over again. "It's not murder when it's an Aug!"

"The *Augs* aren't the *same* as us, the *Augs* aren't the *same* as us! Sing, boys, and all together!"

For Brooke was their hero and liberator. He was going to free the town from Augs, release them from bondage and burdens. For Brooke was a jolly good fellow, and there must, there must, there *must* be unicorns! Two nigger minstrels began a dialogue:

"There must be unicorns!"

"Not likely!"

"Why?"

"Ask Brooke!"

"Hooray!"

"The *Augs* aren't the *same* as us! . . ."

The balloon-women released bunches of bright balloons,

and the kite-men tossed kites in the windy air:

“They ain’t coming back no more, no more,
They ain’t coming back no more!
Oh, how in hell can the Aug folk tell
That they ain’t a-coming back no more?”

The Humble Servants were there, of course, to lead the choruses, for there was no cream where the Augs came from, and “Where do Augs go in the winter-time?” And Sapphy was there, waiting outside the court. And Gervase. They were each sitting on a pedestal at the foot of the stone balustrade. Gervase had snatched a nigger minstrel’s straw hat, and was wearing it rakishly askew and she twanged a borrowed banjo to the tune of “John Peel,” while the Brigade now sang:

“D’ye ken Reg Black, in his coat so gay?
He met with his death at Clifford’s Bay,
And now the Augs must stay far, far away,
And we shan’t see them back in the *sum-mer!*”

But Sapphy, who ought to have been singing, too, Sapphy was just a silly kid, for she did nothing but cry and say that she oughtn’t to have given away that photograph of Reg dressed in a hunting-coat and giving a view-halloo to the camera. But it didn’t matter her crying, because now the journalists came rushing out of the court, and they wore straw hats, like Cook said the Humble Servants did, and Cook knew because she’d been one of the Brigade herself and a landlady, and you had to cut up a leg of mutton so as to make them think there were forty equally good portions, and *that* was no joke. And

they all stopped singing or shouting or anything, waiting to hear the verdict, and the journalists said "Hush!" and "You mustn't tell!" and they put their fingers to their lips, and said "Hush!" again: "They're going to shut him up now, but when the summer comes, when July comes, you see, he'll be down at Clifford's Bay again, and they're going to make him Grand Marshal for the Defence. This is only a blind! He's going to lead all the Committees and Leagues and Councils, but they'll all be armed then, and when the Aug trains come in, they'll be swept back again—s-s-s-swept—back—again——"

Christopher's arm, brandishing in a wide half-circle, knocked over a glass of lemonade standing in front of him. He stopped, looked down in horror at the flow swamping the table-cloth, spreading and spreading. . . . As though a greater catastrophe had happened than he could cope with, he began to cry.

"It's quite all right, old chap, come along upstairs for a bit," said his father, very gently.

They waited for Gordon to come back before any of them spoke. Mrs. Leigh was weeping, and the Colonel stared ferociously into his whisky and soda as though it could enlighten him as to the cause of the misfortune.

Presently Gordon returned.

"What *is* it, Alec?" he asked helplessly. "Did he make it all up, or——" Then: "What are we to do? I never guessed—how could anyone have guessed? Nurse might have, but——"

Mrs. Leigh moaned: "What could possibly have put such ideas into his head?"

Alexander did not reveal what had primarily put the ideas into Christopher's head; not from shirking, for he

took more of the blame and put less on to the heavy years of anti-Aug atmosphere at the Cliff House than was quite just to himself; but because he felt it was wiser not to let anything undermine his authority with the family till he had arranged this vital matter of a visit to the Blacks.

"What in God's name does he mean by Augs?" muttered the Colonel. "*Augs?*"

Dr. Leigh suddenly picked up his father's whisky decanter, poured some into a glass, and gave it to Cousin Nellie. Sitting next to her, he had felt her trembling. Neither she nor he had known the hinterland of Christopher's mind to be quite so flamboyantly peopled.

Then, in what Thomas would have called his most doctorish manner, as detached and lucid as possible, and addressing himself principally to Gordon, he said that Christopher was suffering from an exaggerated illusion over the feud between the Clifford's Bay residents and the August crowds; and that unless he could be brought to realise fundamentally, but as quickly as possible, that these people were in essence exactly the same as every other person, he, Alexander, could not answer for the consequences.

"Well, then," suggested Christopher's Uncle Bernie, keeping the family council as cheerful as possible, for his mother's sake, "someone had better tell him, hadn't they? You, Alec. Or I will, if you like."

"It's not quite as simple as that."

"You mean he's got to have medical treatment? Well—I've read something about a new method; not sure if I believe in it myself, but of course you know all about it."

"Yes, Bernie, we'll thrash it out together one day. Meanwhile," Alexander kept his voice determinedly casual, "meanwhile there can, of course, be no question

of Christopher going back to school until he's cured. I propose sending him away for a few months."

"Not to a home! Oh, Alec——"

"Good Lord, no. That would finish it. No, to stay with the Blacks."

To stay with the Blacks. Who were the Blacks?

"Reg Black's family. There's a young brother of about Christopher's age, and——"

"Alec, have *you* gone mad now?"

"No, Father. I just think it would be a good thing, that's all."

To stay with the Blacks? A good thing for Christopher Gordon Leigh, to be sent from the Cliff House at Clifford's Bay to stay with the Blacks? Reg Black's family?

It had been too much to hope that the fight would be over in a few minutes, even after what they had witnessed of Christopher's state of mind. Finally, Alexander, hating the need, delivered harsh ultimatum:

"If you can't understand, you'll have to accept my word without understanding. This is the only way I can think of that will probably put Christopher right again. I've had a good many years' experience now. If you stick to your refusal—he's done."

A last spatter of objections: "To have to be grateful to Them, those dreadful people? To have to ask Them for a favour?"—"Feud? I don't know what you meant by feud! I never think of these people from one year's end to another!"—"To send him up there, my little son, *alone*, where we don't know what may happen to him!"—"What he may pick up——"—"Common people. He may learn anything from them."

And, as usual, Bernie to the rescue, with an indulgent alternative: "You say there's a kid of Christopher's age. What about bringing him down here instead, if we must, to stay with us for a bit? Wouldn't that do just as well?"

"Though that would be bad enough," from Mrs. Leigh.

"Do *you* think that would do just as well, Gordon?" asked Alexander.

Gordon remained silent. He had indeed a glimmering, more than the others, of how going to stay with the Blacks might aid Christopher. But he was afraid, too. He remembered Hugh, his twin brother. Christopher had always been over-excitabile, like Hugh. He had had to take such special care of the children, especially of Christopher, whenever the Augs were about. And now deliberately to send him away from safety, into what was not only the threshold of danger, but danger itself!

His resistance had slackened, but tormented by memory, it grew tough again; tough beyond breaking. . . . Until Alexander said: "You'll know what's really the matter with him, if you think about Brooke for a moment."

"But that's——"

"Do you want him to end where Brooke is now?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was on the last day of July that Dr. Leigh, prompted as much by affection as by a spasm of uncontrollable human curiosity, went down to Sandiport to see his Cousin Nellie Burton. She had written to him to say that she had chosen to spend her summer holidays there rather than at Clifford's Bay, and she so hoped to see him before he went abroad for his holiday, as his mother had said he was not going down as usual to the Cliff House this summer. And—this was the sentence which brought Dr. Leigh—she was expecting her great friend Louisa Black to stay with her for a whole fortnight.

"The rest of the Blacks are taking the second fortnight in August this year. They're going to Devonshire. It's the first time Lou hasn't gone with them for she doesn't know how long."

"... Nice rooms you've got here," said Dr. Leigh, in what was for him a genial mood.

They were, indeed, very pleasant first-floor rooms, the pick of the bunch at Sandiport; on the front, facing the sea and the esplanade, the pier almost opposite and the band-stand not far away, so that you could hear the music by merely sitting on your little iron balcony without having to put on your hat and go out.

Nellie imagined that she and Lou would very often choose to sit on the balcony and gossip together undisturbed, to the gentle sound of Elgar, Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Merry Widow*, *The Peer Gynt* suite, and the latest

popular tune of the season. And if it rained—there were fears that it might be going to be a wet August—why then, the inside of the room was cheerful, too: cretonne, patterned in black-and-white stripes, with pink roses and green leaves superimposed on them; and several nice pictures; and on the mantelpiece, together with the whole collection of Nellie's own Goss china which she had brought out, were big shells that murmured like waves of the sea when you held them close to your ear. Alexander noticed all these things. He noticed, too, the sumptuous tea already laid out in preparation for Lou's arrival. He hastily refused it, himself. His thoughts rested in amiable benison on the reunited pair who were presently to sit there eating and drinking. It struck him that, if there were such a noun, Lou might be called Nellie's "congenial."

"I expect you'll have lots to tell each other," he remarked, wondering if Nellie would tell Lou, now, the whole drama of what had happened at Clifford's Bay since her departure? Or part of it? Or none of it at all?

"Oh yes," happily, "lots and lots. She'll want to hear all about Bernie's engagement; and, you know, there's been a wedding in the Black family since last summer: Les and Glad. And Lou barely touched on that in her letter, though I gather there's a baby on the way. You remember Les and Glad, don't you? They were with us on that excursion. What fun it was! The last time we had fun, before poor Reg—" Nellie sighed.

"That excursion. Yes . . ." He lit his pipe. "May I, Nellie? Do you mind? Thanks. Yes, that was the time when Gervase crept along under the table to get to Reg at the other end."

"Fancy your remembering that! She looked so delight-

ful that day, didn't she? Emerald green and white; and so full of life! What's become of her, Alec? Do you know? She made a great hit on the music-halls, didn't she, last year? But lately I haven't heard of her."

Alexander replied after a pause, in a voice so robbed of any sort of emotion, praise or disparagement, that his cousin renounced once and for all any idea she may have had that he had been secretly in love with Gervase himself:

"She's engaged at a side-show at the Midland Exhibition, at present. It's called 'Tip Her Out of Bed.' She lies in a bed with netting all round her, and you can throw coconuts or cannon-balls, I'm not sure which they are, and if you hit the target, the bed turns over, and Gervase falls out in her nightdress. And you get your money back."

"Oh . . ." said Cousin Nellie. And then: "I must tell Lou." And, with a puzzled frown: "But surely she must have made quite a lot of money? She was very celebrated, surely, at one time?"

"Notorious is the word," Alexander corrected her. "Oh, but she'd have blued all that. Gervase was extremely extravagant. She wouldn't have been a good wife for Bernie. Nor for Reg," he added.

"Poor Reg . . . But Bernie," more brightly, "he's got over it nicely, hasn't he? Have you met his fiancée? She's Miss Picton-Porter's niece, Doreen, who came down to stay after influenza. Bernie calls her Mavourneen. No, she's not Irish."

"Yes, I've met her. She's all right, I suppose. She's very nice. She's even quite pretty. Anyhow, she's good enough for Bernie."

"Alec!"

"She wouldn't be good enough for me."

"Alec!"

But Miss Burton was smiling. For really, her distinguished cousin, Dr. Leigh, was almost—you might call it schoolboyish—when he let himself go on the subject of his younger brother.

"What a time Bernie will have, during the winter evenings, when there's nothing else to do, telling her how he loved Gervase, and how Gervase loved him until she jilted him for an Aug."

They talked about Augs, talked more freely than ever before.

For led with no difficulty whatever by the Leighs of the Cliff House, to a reversal of their previous policy, the herd of residents at Clifford's Bay had done all that League and Council and Committee could do to make their town a pleasant resort for the summer visitors, who, it was sunnily prophesied in the local papers, would be twice as numerous that year as they had ever been before. The pier had been repainted; there were to be two concert parties instead of one, as so many people had been turned away from the "Humble Servants'" performances last year. A special sun-bathing beach, with licensed café, had been arranged, where tolerance over bare-backed bathing-costumes was prepared to be almost continental. There was to be a band in the Clifford's Bay Park Gardens, with open-air dancing every night. A Greyhound Racing Stadium had been built with lightning speed; a bye-election had been won on the slogan "Beer on the Pier!" and Cafés for Hikers had sprung up everywhere, one of them actually with little tables outside on the pavement, under striped umbrellas.

"Has anyone voted for an arena for bull-fights?" asked

Dr. Leigh, impressed by the recital of attractions.

But Cousin Nellie replied doubtfully that she was not quite sure if that would do in England. She had heard of them abroad, but after all, except during a heat wave, England was hardly hot enough to make people feel like that.

"Well, with all that at your doors, I wonder you and Miss Black have managed to tear yourselves away to Sandiport."

Cousin Nellie smiled, and looked as nearly a rogue as her natural equipment would allow, as she related demurely how Cousin Violet had been very, very kind, and had told Nellie that she and the Colonel would be simply delighted if Miss Black would spend her fortnight's holiday as a guest at the Cliff House, instead of in rooms.

"And you didn't accept?"

"It was very, very kind of Cousin Violet—no, I mean that really. She *was* trying to be kind and hospitable, only I did feel, and I'm sure Lou will agree, that we can enjoy ourselves better on our own. And besides"—again that hint of roguery—"I couldn't help hearing, I wasn't listening on purpose, they thought I'd gone out of the room, but I couldn't help hearing Cousin Violet say to Sybil, after I'd refused: 'Perhaps it's just as well. After all, those people—there's no getting away from it, they're *not* the same as we are.'"

And at that Alexander laughed, delighted, and remarked that it was restful to think that there were incurable cases in the world.

"Not Christopher, thank heaven," said Cousin Nellie, simply.

"No, not Christopher. God, I was frightened, weren't you?"

"That time at dinner, yes. Did you do it on purpose, Cousin Alec?"

"Yes. I thought you would have guessed." But he had been equally frightened again, the next day, when he had broken it to his nephew that he was to miss a term at school, and, instead, go up and stay with the Black family.

"With the Blacks? With Reg Black's people? With—with the Augs?"

"Yes," Alec spoke nonchalantly, trying to quell the breathless excitement mixed with panic, rushing up in the boy. "They're a bit afraid that young Len, Reg's brother—that he'll get hipped on top of all this trouble; but if he could have someone of his own age in the house, to knock about with——"

"Stay with the *Augs*!"

"You wouldn't mind, would you? It would be something new. Something you could use to keep Sheila quiet, afterwards. I thought you'd rather like it."

"With the *Augs* . . . You're making it up, Uncle Alec. Nobody could. We don't even know if they—if there's—if——"

"Oh, you'll find that's quite all right. Otherwise, of course, your father wouldn't let you go."

"You don't mean that Father *knows* that I'm going to stay with the Augs?"

"Naturally he knows. Did you think I was going to help you escape over the garden wall at midnight? He thinks it's a rather good notion."

"And Grandma? And Grandfather? And Aunt Sybil? And Uncle Bernie and Nurse? They *know*!"

"Yes, Christopher. It's all right."

"Shall I go by an Aug train?"

"You'll go by train, yes. I'll take you up myself."

"And then you'll go away again, and leave me there? It's—it's terribly dangerous, isn't it, Uncle Alec?"

"No, Christopher. You've got things a bit topsy-turvy just now. You'll sort them out, soon."

"Do you want me to send any secret bulletins while I'm staying with the Augs?"

"I don't think that would be polite, do you? Besides, there won't be much to bulletin about."

"Shall I be allowed to write home? I mean, are there Aug Post Offices from where they—— It's the other School of Thought, isn't it? Sheila's School, not mine. Mine was, don't you remember, that once they finished down here—— Am I the only one that's going to be sent up? Shall I go by Aug train? Oh, I forgot, you told me. I shall have to pretend hard, *hard*, shan't I, and not use the word Aug at all, while I'm with them?—the same way you mustn't call witches or magicians witches or magicians, but mention them as though they were ladies and gentlemen, or they'll do something. They'll do something if they're not flattered. And Augs may not like to be Augs; they may not know that they *are* Augs. I'm not a bit afraid, except that I rather wish I needn't be quite the *only* one, but I'll do it if it's of any use. Men have done all sorts of dangerous things, haven't they, of use to their countries. And Clifford's Bay is sort of my country. Exploring and the Poles and crossing continents in aeroplanes. But this is more like diving, diving for months, instead of an hour or two. I'll bring back whole heaps of deep-sea relics. I—I shall get plenty of air down there, won't I? I mean, it'll be the kind that I can breathe?"

Alexander wished the boy would not talk so fast, in

that queer taut voice; nor look so white and strained; nor leap so wildly from one question to another. He might, of course, go on reassuring Christopher over and over again, that there was no danger in this visit, because Augs were not Augs, just people; but there still seemed no chance whatever that Christopher would grasp any reassurance contrary to his illusion. That way to his intelligence would remain blocked until, as Nellie had said, he could see for himself. "An ounce of experience," Nellie had begun, and then spoilt her proverb in the ending: "is worth a pound of feathers, isn't it, Cousin Alec?"

So Alexander endured a whole further stream of conjecture as to how his, Christopher's activities in Aug-land would be triumphantly used later on to eject the whole race of invaders for ever from the pier and the beach and the esplanade. And then quite suddenly, all this arrogance had crumpled up, and Christopher had whispered: "But I like—I *like* the Augs!" and had burst into tears after his confession, and nothing comforted him . . .

All over now, and let it be forgotten, as it had been, apparently, by Christopher during his three months away from home. Yet for a short while, Alexander and Nellie talked thankfully of how robust and ordinary he had looked when he had come back to Clifford's Bay at Easter; and how, after the fashion of boys of his age, he had told them little of what he had done and where he had been; and most of Nellie's information had come in letters from Lou, who had said that Christopher seemed a little unsettled at first, a little forlorn and homesick, but that had soon passed away, and he and Len had been such friends really one could not part them for a moment. And because Len, poor boy, had had such a shock in the summer,

his mother and father had thought that he, too, could do with a good long holiday away from school, and let the two lads run about as they pleased for it would do them no harm provided they didn't get into mischief. . . .

"And did you like the rest of the family, Christopher, as well as Len?"

"Oh yes, all right."

"And was it a nice house?"

"It was all right."

"What did you do all day, you and Len? Did they give you a good time?"

"Oh rather, quite all right."

So the Leighs, still feeling a lurking shame, perhaps, did not ask for any more details. The Blacks must have been very nice to Christopher, or he would not have been heard boasting to Sheila with quite so much confidence that he intended to be away with *his* friends now, quite as much as she with hers, whenever school didn't interfere.

"So this August will be the first time that all three children have been at home together since—oh dear—since last September, when it all happened."

"They won't all three be at home. I'm taking Thomas to America for a month."

"Thomas? To America? Now that's strange. And yet I don't know why it should be. So you and Thomas are going to America!"

Alexander drew a folded paper from his pocket-book, and handed it to his cousin to read. "This arrived before Easter. I kept it to show you."

It was a letter from Thomas, written (at last) without guiding lines. A somewhat severe letter. Thomas stated that as Sheila was in France, and Christopher with the

Blacks, he, Thomas, desired to come and stay for an indefinite period (he did not use the word "indefinite") with his uncle in Wimpole Street: "*If you can mannidge Nurse and me I'll come and stay with you, if you can mannidge Nurse.*"

Cousin Nellie looked up, haunted. "That reminds me of something. What is it?"

"Ham and eggs," briefly; "go on."

"As if I stay on here without anybody and nobody invites me, I shall grow quite savvidge. I shant be in your way, but I'm sorry you'll have to have Nurse, too, or there'll be a fuss with Grandma who thinks I can't mannidge without her.—Yours sincerely, Thomas."

"Oh," cried soft-hearted Cousin Nellie, her heart pierced, "poor little fellow! What a shame! And none of us noticed that he was fretting for his brother and sister. Oh, couldn't you have managed to have him?"

Alexander grinned at her interpretation of Thomas's commands, into "fretting."

"No, I'm afraid it was no good thinking of it. I hadn't a moment free for him, from morning till night, and I should have wanted to be with him quite a lot, so it might have got in the way of my work. Besides, I wasn't going to have Nurse all day about the house, talking about Bone Extract and thinking Bryant's a better doctor than I am."

"Would you mind that?" surprised.

Dr. Leigh replied with some astringency: "Certainly. Because it isn't true."

So he had written to Thomas, beginning the letter in his prescription scribble; and then, suddenly remembering

that his younger nephew was only eight, he smiled and broke off, and wrote the rest of the letter on the typewriter, in terms of one man equal to another. At the end appeared a postscript: "Please burn this letter," which was necessary, because he had represented to Thomas that America would be better than Wimpole Street, as in Alexander's holidays they could do without Nurse. And Thomas was satisfied. When he had finished reading the letter, he quite efficiently tossed it over the wire-guard, and saw it burn in the nursery fire.

"America," mused Cousin Nellie. "Skyscrapers. And gangsters. And chewing gum—I do hope you won't let Thomas— And the Statue of Liberty. And Presidents."

"And Augs, I expect," said Alexander. "You never know, even out of Clifford's Bay. Don't look so bothered, Cousin Nellie. Would you rather we didn't call them Augs any more?"

She wrinkled up her brows in an attempt to explain something which she felt was hard to get into words: "It makes them sound dreadfully foreign, and they're not foreign at all when you get to know them—I mean, it seems to me that they're exactly the same as us, except that they have to work harder, and only have one proper holiday a year. And that's for such a short time. And if one has only a fortnight every year to enjoy oneself in, one might perhaps learn somehow to live during that time entirely in the present. They *have* to do that, if they're to enjoy themselves enough to make up for all the rest of the year; so probably that's why they never talk about where they come from or where they're going to."

For the second time in his acquaintance with his Cousin Nellie, Dr. Leigh was impressed. It struck him that much simple wisdom lay in her idea that the residents of

Clifford's Bay had built up this artificial barrier between themselves and the Augs, out of a reprehensible failure to imagine a state of existence simply because it was never spoken of. And yet surely it was a deeply practical idea to get the maximum enjoyment out of holiday, by living as though there were no past and no future, simply because holiday was so short, so concentrated into a tight little space? Such simplicity of judgment, simple as the plan for Christopher's cure, was bold enough that it could only have been achieved by the accident of one resident coming so close to an Aug, one Aug so close to a resident, that there was hardly a borderline between them. Miss Burton and Miss Black; Cousin Nellie and Auntie Lou; an unheroic friendship, containing so little of the sublime, and yet——

"Gracious me!" cried Nellie, interrupting his reverie. She had been fussing round before the looking-glass, putting on her hat and adjusting her scarf; pulling on her gloves; and had just turned over the little watch which lay flat against her chest, pinned there with a gold and enamel bow. She had to press in her chin, and look down narrowly, almost squinting, to see its face, and a soft little double-chin appeared above her scarf. "It's later than I thought! That clock must be wrong. I wouldn't not be at the station for anything, when the train comes in. Will you wait, Alec, and see Lou? She'd be so surprised and pleased!"

Dr. Leigh thought, but he did not say, that he would have been just as likely to remain of his own accord to witness the eventual meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Paradise. He sent his kindest regards to Miss Black:

"I expect you and she will have a good many laughs together over barbed-wire on the pier."

Cousin Nellie shook her head. "No," she said, "we couldn't laugh at that, could we? And besides——"

The rest of her sentence was drowned by a burst of sound, as the first Aug charabanc of the year passed on the sea-front, a triumphal symbolical chariot. Alexander moved over to the window. The people in the front seats were singing a chorus; at the back two lads played the Aug Tattoo on wooden rattles. Somebody shouted: "Mind your morals, Mal" And even after the charabanc had passed, there was a fusillade from the empty nutshells, chocolate-cartons, ginger-beer bottles, cigarette-packages and matchboxes, which had been thrown out and danced gaily on the esplanade.

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